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Official Report

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Tuesday 21 January 2014

Session 4

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Tuesday 21 January 2014

CONTENTS

| | Col. |
|--|-------------|
| TIME FOR REFLECTION | 26755 |
| TOPICAL QUESTION TIME | 26757 |
| University Principals (Pay)..... | 26757 |
| BURRELL COLLECTION (LENDING AND BORROWING) (SCOTLAND) BILL: FINAL STAGE | 26761 |
| <i>Motion moved—[Joan McAlpine].</i> | |
| Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP) | 26761 |
| The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop)..... | 26764 |
| Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)..... | 26766 |
| Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab)..... | 26768 |
| Jackson Carlaw (West Scotland) (Con) | 26769 |
| SUICIDE PREVENTION | 26773 |
| <i>Motion moved—[Michael Matheson].</i> | |
| The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson)..... | 26773 |
| Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab) | 26777 |
| Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con)..... | 26780 |
| Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)..... | 26783 |
| Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab) | 26785 |
| Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP) | 26788 |
| Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP) | 26789 |
| Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD)..... | 26792 |
| Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP) | 26795 |
| James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP) | 26798 |
| Jackson Carlaw (West Scotland) (Con) | 26800 |
| Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)..... | 26802 |
| Michael Matheson..... | 26806 |
| CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL (LEITH LINKS AND SURPLUS FIRE FUND) BILL: PRELIMINARY STAGE | 26811 |
| <i>Motion moved—[John Lamont].</i> | |
| John Lamont (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con) | 26811 |
| Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab) | 26813 |
| Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab) | 26815 |
| Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)..... | 26816 |
| BUSINESS MOTION | 26819 |
| <i>Motion moved—[Joe FitzPatrick]—and agreed to.</i> | |
| DECISION TIME | 26820 |
| LIFT LIVES FOR GOOD | 26821 |
| <i>Motion debated—[John Finnie].</i> | |
| John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)..... | 26821 |
| Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)..... | 26824 |
| Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab) | 26825 |
| Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (Ind) | 26826 |
| Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con) | 26827 |
| Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD)..... | 26829 |
| The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess)..... | 26831 |

Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 21 January 2014

[The Presiding Officer *opened the meeting at 14:00*]

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The first item of business is time for reflection. Our leaders today are William Seaborne and Ruth Laird, who are pupils at Queen Anne high school, Dunfermline.

Ruth Laird (Queen Anne High School, Dunfermline): Presiding Officer, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the privilege of delivering time for reflection. My name is Ruth and beside me is William, and we attend Queen Anne high school in Dunfermline.

Last September, we were given the opportunity to visit the Nazi concentration and death camp Auschwitz-Birkenau through the Holocaust Educational Trust's lessons from Auschwitz project. It was a long day, but the history of the camp and the constant reminder that I was walking around a place that had been a scene of mass murder only 70 years ago ensured that I paid attention to every detail.

My most vivid memory from the day is being taken into an almost bare room, with a display of twisted metal and wooden objects in front of me. I stood there, trying to figure out what the objects had once been used for. I noticed a single wooden crutch leaning against the wall and realised that all the objects had once belonged to people with some form of physical disability. At the front of the heap was a prosthetic leg. I tried to form an image of what the person who had used it looked like. Later, as I stood in the gas chambers, I realised that the person who had once needed that leg would have stood there too, awaiting his or her fate, simply because they did not fit in with the Nazis' idea of a perfect world.

William Seaborne (Queen Anne High School, Dunfermline): Before our visit, we heard from someone who had made a similar journey to ours 70 years before, but under extremely different circumstances. Kitty Hart-Moxen is one of the most inspirational and impressive people I have ever met. She spent two years in the Lublin ghetto, endured a further two gruelling years in Auschwitz-Birkenau and survived a death march over the Sudeten mountain range. The final terrible journey for Kitty was being loaded on to a cattle cart, the doors of which were sealed shut, and being abandoned outside Salzwedel concentration camp. Kitty survived by breathing through a small hole in the cart until American

forces opened the cart hours later. Kitty eventually ended up in Birmingham with her mother and uncle, who were her only surviving relatives.

The LFA project made me more aware of what individuals such as Kitty went through and helped me realise what a relative of mine had been through. Hans Lustig, my great uncle, was a Czechoslovakian who fled to Norway after the Nazi invasion but was captured and sent to Auschwitz. He was one of the few to return. Because of the journey I took to Auschwitz, I was able to relate to and repersonalise a man I never had the privilege of meeting. It opened my eyes to the lives of others: those who died and those who survived.

Next Monday, on Holocaust memorial day, please take a moment to reflect on the Holocaust—the darkest period in our shared history. I hope that you will remember the journeys that people such as Kitty were forced to take and remember those who arrived in Scotland, such as Ernest Levy, who survived Auschwitz-Birkenau, and Henry and Ingrid Wuga, both of whom arrived here as refugees, having suffered persecution at the hands of the Nazis. As Holocaust Educational Trust ambassadors, we will do our best to encourage others to learn about and remember the Holocaust, so that we never forget what happened. I hope that you will join us and do the same. Thank you.

Topical Question Time

14:04

University Principals (Pay)

1. Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the report in *The Herald* on 20 January 2014 on the pay of university principals. (S4T-00569)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): As they are autonomous institutions, the salary levels of university principals and other senior staff are matters for each institution's governing body and remuneration committee. However, I expect senior university management and governing bodies to demonstrate clear leadership and accountability by ensuring that pay awards to principals are not out of step with those that are available to staff and to ensure the highest standards of transparency as recommended by the von Prondzynski review of higher education governance in Scotland. I will re-emphasise that point at the university sector advisory forum's next meeting.

Ken Macintosh: I am delighted to hear that the minister will re-emphasise a point that he has already made. Does he not recognise the outrage that exists not only across the public sector but across Scotland at the above-inflation salary increases that have been awarded to senior management in universities, particularly given that they are already the highest paid public servants in Scotland? Two of those people have received increases of 11 and 24 per cent.

The cabinet secretary's own review, which was chaired by Professor von Prondzynski, called for remuneration committees, which agree salary levels, to include members of staff and university students to increase transparency. Why has he not implemented that proposal?

Michael Russell: The code of governance that the universities accepted at the end of that process makes it clear that there should be transparency in salary setting. There are issues about the involvement in salary boards of what are, essentially, in business terms, executive directors. Therefore, it is better for that work to be undertaken by independent voices.

I make it clear that I do not support or endorse what has taken place. If principals, as they do from time to time, ask my private advice on what they should do, my advice is unequivocal. They should do what has been done by Scottish Government ministers and right across the public sector: they should make sure that they show both restraint and leadership. They certainly should not allow

themselves to be awarded pay increases that are massively out of step with the salary terms and conditions that are offered to their staff. I cannot be any clearer than that. Perhaps the member wants me to nationalise every Scottish university, but I seem to remember that his accusation was that I was interfering too much rather than too little.

Ken Macintosh: To hear Mr Russell's private advice when we are talking about public funds is not acceptable to the Parliament. This is a public matter—£500 million of public money goes to these institutions. Why does he think that he cannot intervene on the matter? It is not as though this would be the first time he has done so. He is quite prepared, for example, to intervene on local authorities, which are democratically elected, and set class sizes at a national level.

Last year, a report identified more than 8,500 people on zero-hours contracts in the university sector. Last year's response to my freedom of information request revealed that severance pay over the past few years in the universities alone has amounted to £110 million, of which £34 million was spent on compulsory redundancies. If the cabinet secretary believes that he has a role in the matter, he should act. In particular, he should act on high pay. Is it the case that he cannot act or that he will not act?

Michael Russell: The member's indignation no doubt does him credit, but it does not address the practicalities of the issue. I repeat that universities are autonomous institutions. That is not a difficult concept. In those circumstances, universities are entitled to make their own decisions. Therefore, we need to show leadership in the matter. The Parliament has very effectively shown leadership on pay restraint. We also showed that restraint with those bodies for which we are responsible and which we control, although I must say that virtually all those bodies were willing to follow that restraint.

Institutions that are entirely free to make their own decisions should remain free to make their own decisions. If the member wants us to nationalise universities, I again challenge him to say so. I am unequivocal in my view that what we have seen is unacceptable. I have made that clear. I am also unequivocal in my view that, when I am asked for my advice, I give it. Here I am giving it in public, too, in case those principals who have not asked for my advice decide to do so. It is unacceptable to allow senior salary increases to get so out of step with what is available to the staff of universities. I hope that that message is heard loud and clear. If the member wishes to introduce legislation to nationalise every Scottish university, let him do so; otherwise I ask that he join me and be clear and unequivocal in his view.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): I have a number of indications that members want to ask supplementary questions. I say to members who wish to ask a supplementary question that Ken Macintosh's question was on the pay of university principals, and I am not prepared to go wider than that. If your question is not about that and you want to withdraw it, I am sure that you will press your button.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): There has been understandable interest in and concern about the recent announcement of pay increases, and that is inevitable as we go forward. Although staff and students are not represented on remuneration committees—Ken Macintosh alluded to that—those committees' decisions are scrutinised and decided on by the governing bodies under the new code. What are the cabinet secretary's expectations of that process in respect of the rate of increase of principals' pay in future?

Michael Russell: That is a reasonable question, and the reasonable answer is that I have made it absolutely clear that those who are in charge of setting the terms and conditions—those on university courts or elsewhere—need to make it clear that they do not believe that pay, and particularly pay increases, for principals and other senior staff should run massively out of step with what is available to other members of staff. At a time when increases are being restricted to very low levels—if there is any increase at all—that is the right thing to happen for those at every level in universities. There should not be a rule for one and no rule for another.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I acknowledge the point that was made about the remuneration committees, but does the cabinet secretary expect the principal of the University of the Highlands and Islands to be paid on a par with other university principals in Scotland, when the principal of each UHI further education college has significant responsibilities?

Michael Russell: That is a decision for the autonomous institution. I stress that again. I remember that, in the debates on the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill, there was an attempt to criticise me virtually every time I stood up on the ground that I was trying to interfere with universities and colleges. There are many decisions that those autonomous institutions are entirely free to take.

We can see from the published table where the salary of the principal of the University of the Highlands and Islands is. That is a matter for that university. The issue is not comparative rates; it is the freedom of the universities and colleges, and what they do year on year. As the table shows, some are showing commendable restraint—for some, there is no increase or a modest increase—

but some appear to be substantially out of kilter with the current norm. That is the issue to which we should address ourselves. I have no hesitation in saying that that is unacceptable.

Burrell Collection (Lending and Borrowing) (Scotland) Bill: Final Stage

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-08577, in the name of Joan McAlpine, on the Burrell Collection (Lending and Borrowing) (Scotland) Bill. Overall, we have a bit of time in hand in the debate. We will make up for interventions by giving members more speaking time.

I call Joan McAlpine to speak to and move the motion on behalf of the Burrell Collection (Lending and Borrowing) (Scotland) Bill Committee.

14:13

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I thank the clerks, the Scottish Parliament information centre staff, my committee colleagues, who helped to scrutinise the bill, and everyone who gave evidence on it.

The Burrell collection is an outstanding vision of international significance, and after careful consideration of the wide range of oral and written evidence, the Burrell Collection (Lending and Borrowing) (Scotland) Bill Committee is firm in its belief that the time has come to allow it to be seen by a wider audience. Indeed, I believe that we have a duty to the people of Glasgow and the people of Scotland to promote the collection, which is a hidden treasure.

The Burrell collection opened in 1993 and at first had 1 million visitors a year. Sadly, that figure has diminished dramatically; it is now down to fewer than a quarter of a million visitors. As Dr Bridget McConnell pointed out in her evidence to the committee, the collection is still relatively unknown both here and internationally. Amending the 1944 bequest to allow a significant and, probably, once-in-a-lifetime world tour will help to raise awareness of it both at home and abroad. It is hoped that such a tour will also help to facilitate future preservation of the collection by engagement with the international community's art institutions on research, conservation and mutually beneficial loans.

I was impressed with the evidence that Sir Angus Grossart, who is one of Scotland's foremost art collectors, gave to the committee. He has been very involved in advising Glasgow Life on its plans. Speaking of the proposed tour, he told us:

"This is a chance to engage with a wider range of institutions, including those to which we are not sending the loan exhibition."—[*Official Report, Burrell Collection (Lending and Borrowing) (Scotland) Bill Committee*; 9 September 2013; c 42.]

He spoke of the opportunities for scholarship and profile raising that can result from loan offers. In fact, wider engagement by the public, scholarship, conservation, fundraising, awareness raising, profile raising and tourism were all frequently cited as potential benefits that can accrue from lending.

There is also the practical and very immediate problem that the building that houses the collection is in urgent need of refurbishment and does not, in its current condition, provide a safe environment. The committee witnessed at first hand the regrettable condition of the building, which is strewn with tarpaulins in order to prevent further water ingress. Several exhibits have been removed from display to prevent water damage, and it is estimated that only about 2,000 of the 9,000 items in the collection can be displayed at any one time. The prospect of the extra capacity that would be provided through refurbishment and the opportunity that that would bring to display items that are currently inaccessible to the public are very welcome.

As with any capital project, financial costs figured significantly in the discussions surrounding the refurbishment. The promoters have argued that a tour of the Burrell collection could raise approximately £15 million of the estimated £45 million cost of the refurbishment. Although the committee is not fully convinced that it is possible to estimate revenue with any degree of certainty at this stage, we accept that a contribution is likely to be raised by promoting the collection globally. We are not convinced that that contribution will amount to £15 million, but I emphasise the strong feeling that the issue at hand is about raising not money but the profile of the collection. The bill is not about judging Glasgow City Council on how much money it will spend on refurbishment; it is about the principle of lending and promoting the collection.

It is indisputable that William Burrell was very much in favour of the principle of lending. We know that he wanted to share the collection through loans, and it was often pointed out during evidence sessions that Burrell himself was a considerable lender. The focus of the committee's decision has, therefore, not been on whether Sir William would have been in favour of lending his collection—we know that he was—but on whether it is safe nowadays to lend outside Britain.

In the bequest in 1944, Sir William stipulated that he would not allow any of his works to be loaned overseas. As a shipping magnate, he was all too aware of how the works that he had collected might be damaged in transit at that time. However, Sir Peter Hutchison, the chair of the Burrell trustees, has put forward the argument that, on the whole, transportation is now much safer than it used to be and that although risk

cannot be eliminated, it can be mitigated. We found that to be a convincing argument. As a result, the committee was persuaded that it is sometimes appropriate to depart from the wishes of benefactors, particularly if the circumstances that led them to adopt a certain position have changed.

We have heard convincing arguments that Burrell wished to promote access to his collection as long as it was not placed in danger. The committee noted, however, valid concerns relating to transportation of particularly fragile works such as pastels and textiles. Indeed, we were so concerned about the matter that we elected to take further evidence on it. Having taken further expert evidence, we concluded that decisions regarding the lending of certain items should be taken case by case.

Crucially, the bill provides for the preparation of a lending code to be agreed by Glasgow City Council and the Burrell trustees, which will set out the basis on which new powers for lending and borrowing can be exercised. That will offer another layer of protection for fragile items. The code should safeguard against excessive and overcommercial lending and against very fragile items being put at unreasonable risk. After an initial tour, lending decisions would be based primarily on scholarship and the opportunity for conservation. Moreover, the committee recognises that Glasgow Museums is an experienced lender and we were told in evidence that it has an impressive record with regard to lending and borrowing a great number of items without having made a single insurance claim.

In recommending that the bill be passed, the committee and Parliament are placing their trust in the promoter to take great care of the collection and to ensure that the refurbishment that has been used as an argument in favour of the bill does, indeed, take place.

Sir William Burrell was a pragmatic man. We have established that he was not against the principle of touring or lending, and was very much in favour of the promotion of his collection. Although Britain might in many senses have been at the centre of the world while Sir William lived, that is no longer the reality, and the kind of museums that the promoter is talking about touring the collection to are world class.

By all accounts, the state of the building that currently houses the collection is now critical, and given that the estimated length of the refurbishment period is four years, the fact is that the collection must be moved somewhere. Under the terms of Burrell's bequest, works can be moved around Great Britain, so it can be presumed that he accepted the risks that are inherent in transportation of items. If we take that

into account, along with the scientific and technological advances that have been made, which we heard about in evidence, it seems reasonable to suggest that, on balance, Sir William Burrell would not be opposed to the principle of the bill.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the Burrell Collection (Lending and Borrowing) (Scotland) Bill be passed.

The Presiding Officer: Fiona Hyslop has six minutes, but we will be generous.

14:20

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): In my role as Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs, I want to offer some final thoughts on the provisions of the Burrell Collection (Lending and Borrowing) (Scotland) Bill and the impact that it will have on the Burrell collection.

As members will be aware, the Burrell collection is one of the most prominent and varied collections in Scotland. It is, without doubt, a collection of international significance in terms of the history of art and antiquities. The 9,000-strong collection was assembled by Sir William Burrell as he travelled widely around the world. As we have heard, in 1944 he gifted his remarkable collection to the city of Glasgow, along with the funds to erect a new building within which to house his treasures. Now, nearly 70 years after his bequest, the bill aims to secure the long-term sustainability of that building and to look at new ways of promoting his collections to a wider audience, thereby allowing more people to learn about and enjoy them than ever before.

The bill has been considered by the committee and by Parliament in the preliminary stage debate. Throughout much of the bill's consideration, it has been clear to me that the main concerns have been the very sensitive issue of overturning some of the express wishes of Sir William Burrell; what will happen to the items that he so carefully collected—some of which are fragile and delicate, and many of which are priceless and irreplaceable; and the increased risk of harm to those items if they are allowed to be loaned internationally to other institutions.

The committee did a thorough job of considering those sensitive issues as part of its analysis of the evidence. As well as weighing up the risks and opportunities that the bill offers, the members of the committee looked back at Sir William Burrell's lifetime and asked themselves what he might have done were he faced with the same questions today, in a world in which science and technology are markedly different to what he knew.

The committee's analysis led it to conclude that Burrell was a lender who wanted to share his collection with the people, not just in Glasgow and Scotland, but further afield through loans within Great Britain. The preliminary debate did not find any fault with the committee's acceptance of the bill's proposals, and we are now at the final stage of the bill's passage.

This Government believes that cultural participation can be increased by maximising the number and range of people who see collections. Encouraging visits and the enjoyment of museums is a key aim of "Going Further: The National Strategy for Scotland's Museums and Galleries"; allowing lending from the Burrell collection is consistent with that aim. Lending from the collection and borrowing by the collection could be done only in agreement with the Burrell trustees on a case-by-case basis. A tour and lending of individual items would bring the collection to the attention of an international audience and would enable people from all over the world to see and appreciate it, thus raising its profile and putting Glasgow—and Scotland—on an international stage.

This year of homecoming, when the eyes of the world are on Scotland for the Commonwealth games and the Ryder cup, is an opportunity for all Scotland's cultural institutions to build on their already impressive international image. The proposed ability of the Burrell collection to lend and tour is a great example of that. The bill will enable the collection to promote Scotland and will enable awareness of the collection to be raised while the building is refurbished to display more of the 9,000 works of art that it holds.

The committee's report and the preliminary debate considered the risks to care and preservation that are posed by the prospect of international transportation of art works. The bill committee's meticulous report balanced those criticisms against the benefits that could be achieved by increasing access to the collection and raising the funds to support restoration of the building. It is worth noting that the evidence suggests that damage occurs during packing and unpacking of items—something that would happen whether an item was being transported across Glasgow or to the other side of the world, or being stored away while a building was refurbished.

As I have said previously, we can see from the massive success of the Scottish national portrait gallery, the national museum of Scotland and, in Glasgow, the Kelvingrove museum refurbishment and the new Riverside transport museum, what can be achieved by investing in cultural institutions and bringing our museums up to date for the 21st century: it results in soaring visitor numbers and increased customer satisfaction. Given its

significance, it seems only logical that the Burrell collection should be next.

The Scottish Government thanks Parliament for its consideration of the bill and supports the bill's being passed. With that, I bring my remarks to a close, and record again my thanks to the bill committee. Private bill committees are a frequently unsung role and responsibility of Parliament, but private bills are as much a part of parliamentary democracy as bills that are introduced by committees or, indeed, by the Government. I thank the committee members for the diligence and duty that they demonstrated under the stewardship of Joan McAlpine.

The Presiding Officer: We move to open debate. Two members have indicated that they wish to speak. Gordon MacDonald and Mark Griffin have generous time: you have a minimum of four minutes.

14:26

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer.

Before we pass the Burrell Collection (Lending and Borrowing) (Scotland) Bill, it is important to highlight some of the concerns that members of the public still have about the bill and the refurbishment project. In relation to lending and borrowing, I can see the merits of being able to tour a small number of items for one-off exhibitions during the closure period. I also accept that lending or borrowing individual items may assist interpretation or complement the collection.

However, some people see it differently. The following online comment expresses another view on the proposed new lending and borrowing powers:

"Sir William's overriding concern was not, that he did not want items sent overseas because he feared that they would be at risk during transportation; rather, Sir William's overriding concern was that the collection was kept intact as a meaningful collection. The collection was the man's life work. The collection—in its entirety—told the story of the development of human civilisation: from ancient Egypt and China through to the works of the French Impressionists and the Glasgow Boys. The collection was to be his legacy, because it represented his own unique view of human history, and he wanted people to understand that. The collection was how he would live on after he died, and to this end he tried to ensure that the collection would remain intact long after he was gone."

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): Does Gordon MacDonald accept that although William Burrell wanted the collection to be kept together and to be shown to the public, the condition of the building just now is such that many items in the collection have never been shown to the public and that one of the ways to deal with that while the building is being

refurbished is to allow the items to be seen outwith Scotland?

Gordon MacDonald: Yes—I totally accept James Dornan's point. Of the 9,000 items in the collection, only about 2,000 are on display at any particular time and the collection has not been refreshed for many years.

Regardless of what Sir William Burrell's reasons were for not wanting the collection to tour, we as a committee accepted the need for change. However, there are issues relating to the Burrell gallery refurbishment that can be addressed by Glasgow City Council in order to alleviate some of the other concerns. The council should outline how it arrived at the £45 million refurbishment cost and what it hopes that level of investment will achieve. During the evidence session that was held at Pollok house we heard that the aims are to replace the roof, to increase the gallery space by 20 per cent by creating a new picture gallery in the underused lecture theatre, and to upgrade the facilities. Would that really cost £45 million?

Then, there is the question of funding. The council has stated that it will fund a third of the cost, the lottery will fund another third and donations and sponsorship will provide the other £15 million. Less than 7 per cent of the cost of the new Riverside museum, which opened in 2011, was raised from donations and sponsorship, yet the council expects to raise a third of the cost of the Burrell collection refurbishment from commercial sources—in the current economic climate. What will happen if that funding is not found? Will the council use the £15 million that was earmarked for the aborted George Square refurbishment to close the gap?

Another issue is the timing of the refurbishment, which is due to start in 2016. What will happen between now and then? Will the gallery remain open for that two-year period? What steps will the council take to protect the items that are on display during that time? Consideration also has to be given to the 200,000 people, many from overseas, who visit the gallery every year. During the estimated four-year closure period, will the council provide a temporary display area for the collection so that the city continues to benefit from it? One option may be to use the McLellan galleries, which have been closed for 10 years but were recently brought back into temporary use by the Royal Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts, which hosted its 152nd annual exhibition there in December.

The Burrell collection was left to the people of Glasgow, and it is now time that the council informed its citizens what its detailed plans are for refurbishment of the Burrell gallery.

14:31

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak in the final debate on the Burrell Collection (Lending and Borrowing) (Scotland) Bill. I take the opportunity, as I did in the preliminary stage debate, to thank the witnesses for taking the time to submit evidence in writing and in person; the committee clerks for pulling together lists of potential witnesses, compiling and distributing written submissions and giving legal advice on different aspects of the proposal; the committee's convener for the smooth running of committee meetings and the consensual approach to the proposal; and the promoter for accommodating the guided tour of the Burrell collection and being flexible with some of the committee's requests.

The Burrell collection is a large collection of art and artefacts, although people do not grasp and appreciate just how large it is until they visit the art stores underneath the displays and see the sheer volume of items that are not on display. Sir William Burrell gifted the collection to the Corporation of the City of Glasgow in 1944, and items were added to the collection by the Sir William Burrell Trust, which was established by Sir William's will, when he died in 1958.

The Burrell collection is housed in a custom-designed building in Pollok country park. As a result of a poorly designed roof, members of staff are constantly moving exhibits to protect them from water damage. Large exhibition spaces are closed to the public, which restricts the space that is available for displaying items, and the tarpaulins that have been arranged into giant green funnels to direct water into wheelie bins do not add to the atmosphere of a gallery that houses magnificent and priceless works of art.

Water continues to leak through the roof because the source of the leak—or, probably, multiple sources—cannot be identified. After the water has penetrated the roof, it is absorbed by the layer of insulation that sits underneath until that is saturated, and water then leaks out at random points throughout the building, threatening items in the collection. That means that staff are always on the look out for new sources of water running along ceiling beams or down walls, rather than speaking to members of the public to offer advice about interpretation of the pieces of art that are on display. Many experts have stated that the water could cause disastrous damage to fragile artworks but, similarly, the repeated moving of exhibitions and pieces of art because of the water also creates increased risks of wear and tear.

Another issue is control of humidity, air pressure and air temperature for the collection, which are critical in preservation of works of art. That is made much more difficult when a layer of wet

insulation sits on the roof. I can understand that from an engineering perspective.

The key question is whether we as a Parliament feel that it is appropriate for us to approve of altering the will of someone who is no longer here. That is not about borrowing or lending, because Sir William Burrell made it clear that he approved of borrowing and lending in the United Kingdom. The alteration is about the power to borrow and lend overseas. There is a precedent from other trusts, which gave evidence that they had disregarded some benefactors' wishes for what they described as "practical" reasons. Refurbishment of the Burrell collection's building falls firmly into the category of practical reasons.

It has been speculated that, because of his considerable shipping expertise, Sir William Burrell was uncomfortable with his treasured items travelling by boat, because any number of items could be lost in a sea disaster. It is impossible to know why he made the stipulation in his will, but insurers and transporters stated that art transport has—understandably—changed dramatically since his time.

Today, the biggest risks when transporting pieces of art arise when they are packed and unpacked—that point has been touched on—so lending and borrowing in the UK carry similar risk to lending overseas. A risk is also presented when pieces of art are taken down from wall displays and moved to different locations because of water ingress in the collection building. There is a balance to be struck in considering whether items might be safer in foreign museums, which would allow for the refurbishment that will mean that items could be brought back.

As I have said, it is impossible to second-guess the motives for the stipulation in the will. However, given the requirement to carry out works in the collection building, I ask Parliament to support the bill at decision time.

14:37

Jackson Carlaw (West Scotland) (Con): I, too, congratulate Joan McAlpine on how she spoke to the motion and convened the committee. I thank the clerks and all those who gave evidence to the committee.

No objections to the bill were received. We passed the preliminary stage without any disagreement and no amendments were lodged at the consideration stage. With a great deal of consensus, we have moved forward to the final stage today.

I well remember the Burrell collection opening in 1983 in Glasgow's Pollok park—a wonderful lung in the centre of the city, which the Stirling Maxwell

family donated to the city in perpetuity. The park also plays host to the activities of the young ladies of Craigholme school for girls, who whack hockey sticks around at one end of it; to the dog and mounted divisions of Police Scotland; and to various sports clubs.

In the heart of the park, Her Majesty the Queen opened the Burrell collection building in 1983. It is a citadel of aluminium, glass, concrete and red sandstone—

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab) rose—

Jackson Carlaw: I am building up, Mr Findlay—do not spoil the illusion. It was like the city of Oz on a gleaming hill when it opened and it attracted all manner of people, many of whom had never visited an art collection before.

Neil Findlay: I am glad that Jackson Carlaw remembers that. Given that Mr Griffin was not born at that time, perhaps Jackson Carlaw can tell him about it.

Jackson Carlaw: Mr Findlay invites me to do something that I was planning to undertake in any event.

I lived near the building and it stimulated in me—along with many other people—a tremendous interest in the arts. What Sir William donated to the city, which is now contained in the Burrell collection building in Pollok park, is probably one of the finest individual collections ever to be assembled anywhere in the world. It is hugely eclectic in nature and includes Egyptian artefacts; a very fine Chinese collection; medieval suits of armour; one of the world's largest collections—which I found on my tour of the items in the basement that are rarely displayed—of Tudor bed frames, which is perhaps not the most exciting draw that one can imagine; its pastels; and the fantastic Degas collection.

I remember, as a young man, being struck by Boudin's "The Beach at Trouville", which shows the Empress Eugénie promenading there. I remember buying a print of it, which stimulated in me a desire to visit the Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume in Paris, where all the impressionist paintings were gathered at that time before they were moved to the Musée d'Orsay.

I am sure that, for other people too, the Burrell collection stimulated interest in arts in the widest possible sense. In addition to the things I have mentioned, the collection contains the Warwick vase, a fine collection of bronzes including busts by Rodin, and a tremendous collection of Turkish carpets, which I have to say looked a bit gloomy to me as a young man of 24. It has terrific collections of tapestries and wonderful stained glass, and, from Sir William's own home, four rooms that were

imported in their entirety into the fabric of the building.

It was one of the most exciting new museums of its time, but sadly tastes and times change. For all that we would have wished—as other members have said—that the building had proved to be more robust, the committee was persuaded that a phased renovation of the Burrell collection would simply not be possible because of the membranous nature of the roof, which has absorbed so much water and moisture that it is leaking at points that are unrelated to the originating point of any leak. The building must now undergo a major renovation.

It is also fair to say that what was new and exciting in display and presentation in 1983 is far less so today, and that the museum's attendance figures have fallen sharply over the years. The committee was persuaded that the building needs to be renovated, so the question then was whether to accede to the council's wish to vary the terms of Sir William's will in order that the collection could travel internationally.

Sir William never had any objection to the collection being lent elsewhere in the United Kingdom, but at the time when he made his bequest, he specifically stated that he did not wish it to travel internationally. We were in no position other than to try to consider what was underpinning the terms of Sir William's bequest at that point, and we were reasonably satisfied, given that he had no objection to the collection being lent, that his principal concern was that international travel at that time was such that there was a very real risk of the collection or parts of it being lost if it were to be toured internationally.

That was then; this is now. We heard from many witnesses, some of whom are involved in transporting arts and antiquities, who are satisfied that we could now allow that variation to take place without undue risk to the collection.

People who have made representations—which, it is interesting to note, are still coming in from those who are concerned—have objected in essence to one of two things. First, they point to examples of artefacts' having been damaged in transit without appreciating that, nine times out of 10, the damage has been done by porters in the museum in which the exhibit currently rests when moving it from one part of the museum to the other, rather than because of anything related to international travel.

Secondly, a slightly academic argument began about whether we were setting a precedent for bequests in general and the terms that are associated with them by agreeing to variation of Sir William Burrell's bequest. We took evidence on that from Professor George Gretton, who made an

interesting point—which was beyond the committee's brief—with regard to how long after a bequest is made one can reasonably expect its terms to be maintained. Professor Gretton thought that, if we were to have that debate, a period of some 50 years would be reasonable.

However, our concern was about what benefit there would be to the collection being toured. The answer is, quite simply, this: attendances have fallen from 1 million to barely 200,000. The Burrell collection is still in a wonderful location, which is being refurbished, including parts of it that I did not even know existed—a theatre, artists' rooms and various conservation rooms, which will be adapted to display more of the collection.

With the publicity that is attendant on taking this wonderful collection that belongs to Glasgow and Scotland around the world, we will, in effect, make a magnificent shop window for tourism to the city and the country. We will also then be able to borrow other items that Sir William bid for but did not get, and which would form a complete set of some of the artefacts that are on display.

Parliament has the opportunity to give the Burrell collection, Glasgow and Scotland a chance to boost our cultural representation abroad, and to recreate that fabulous collection in a refurbished facility in Pollok park in Glasgow.

Suicide Prevention

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-08800, in the name of Michael Matheson, on suicide prevention.

We have an ample sufficiency of time this afternoon so I am able to give the minister a generous 13 minutes. I am able to be similarly generous to other members.

14:46

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): I am pleased to open the debate on behalf of the Scottish Government.

As the motion says,

“significant progress ... has been made in recent years in suicide prevention”.

In 2012, there were 762 deaths by suicide in Scotland. We all want that number to be lower but the 2012 figure nevertheless represents a welcome decrease on the number of suicides in 2011. In 2012, as in each of the previous two years, we saw one of the lowest levels of suicide in Scotland since 1991. The three-year rolling average rate shows that, between 2000 and 2002, and 2010 and 2012, there has been an overall downward trend in suicide rates, with an overall decrease in Scotland of 18 per cent.

That progress reflects the priority that I believe the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament have given suicide prevention and mental health in the work that they have done since devolution. The Parliament has given attention to suicide prevention and to the wider mental health policy agenda for a significant number of years, and that has been widely recognised by many people outwith Scotland.

The motion also says that

“there is still work to be done to reduce suicides further”.

In December 2013, we published our new “Suicide Prevention Strategy 2013-16”. The intention is to build on previous work, while setting out commitments and actions for the next three years.

I will talk about what has been achieved already and the firm basis on which we have built our new commitments. I will also talk about how we developed our new suicide strategy and the importance of basing practical actions on established and emerging evidence to benefit people who are at risk of suicide and those who care for them.

As members are aware, “Choose Life”, a 10-year suicide prevention strategy and action plan, was published in 2002. At the end of 2012, we

formed a working group to consider our future strategy and action on the prevention of suicide and self-harm. With the working group and a reference group, we developed an engagement paper to support progress on developing a new strategy for the prevention of suicide and self-harm. From February to May last year, several engagement events took place across the country at which stakeholders, including interested members of the public, had the opportunity to feed in their aspirations for a new phase of suicide prevention action in Scotland.

The engagement paper prompted discussion on a range of key issues at the engagement events and in the many written responses that were received. Those responses helped to inform the preparation of our new strategy on the prevention of suicide—I will say a little bit more about that later.

First, it is worth reflecting on some of the progress that has been made in suicide prevention over recent years by people working in a range of sectors across Scotland. As I said, in 2012, as in each of the previous two years, we saw one of the lowest levels of suicide in Scotland since 1991, and since 2000 to 2002 there has been an overall downward trend in suicides, with an overall decrease of 18 per cent. That means that we have achieved most of the planned reductions in suicide rates as set out in the choose life strategy.

Looking to the future, I mentioned that our engagement paper prompted discussion on a range of key issues, both at the engagement events and in the many written responses that we received. The comments received were considered by my officials, the working group and the reference group.

Through those deliberations, we have developed a robust new suicide prevention strategy for Scotland. I had the pleasure of launching the strategy last month when I addressed the annual stakeholders forum, which was organised by NHS Health Scotland’s choose life programme team. The strategy contains 11 commitments across five themed areas: responding to people in distress; talking about suicide; improving the national health service response to suicide; developing the evidence base; and supporting change and improvement.

Our purpose in the strategy is to focus on a number of key areas for future work that we believe will continue the downward trend in suicide in Scotland that we have seen over the past 10 years. We want the strategy to deliver better outcomes to people who are suicidal and who come to services; to their families and carers; and to those who are not in contact with services. We also want to ensure that we improve our knowledge of what works in this complex field.

We acknowledge that there is a broader focus on activities that are not directly related to suicide prevention but which, if taken forward effectively, will contribute to reducing the overall suicide rate. Such activities include building resilience and mental health and emotional wellbeing in schools and in the general population; working to reduce inequality, discrimination and stigma; and promoting good early years services.

All that work is undertaken in the context of being vigilant about improving mental health; supporting people who experience mental illness; and preventing suicide. The strategy continues the trend in previous strategies of focusing on where the evidence leads us. The strategy echoes key messages—learned from practice and research—that suicide is preventable; that it is everyone's business; and that collaborative working is key to successful suicide prevention.

Members may recall that the engagement paper covered prevention of suicide and of self-harm. However, after taking into account the views that were received in the engagement process and the deliberations of the working group and the reference group, we have taken the approach that our strategy should focus on suicide prevention. Although it covers self-harm as a risk factor for suicide, it does not specifically deal with support for people who self-harm as a coping mechanism.

We will undertake separate work this year on supporting people at risk of self-harm, including those in distress. That will link with the commitment in the mental health strategy to develop an approach that focuses on improving the response to distress. As many members will know, we are working with NHS Tayside and other partners to develop a shared understanding of the challenge and the appropriate local responses that can engage and support people who are experiencing distress, and to provide support for practitioners.

I mentioned the importance of following the evidence. A growing evidence base has emerged in recent years that suggests that there are practical actions that we can take to reduce suicide. For example, improving the NHS response to suicide, which is one of our five themes, is based on evidence from a range of sources such as the Scottish suicide information database, or ScotSID, and the national confidential inquiry into suicide and homicide by people with mental illness.

As well as pointing to the actions that can be taken in the NHS setting to support people who might be at risk of suicide, ScotSID has thrown up challenges that we need to look at further. For example, those who died by suicide tend to have had fairly extensive contact with a range of healthcare services, including general

practitioners, accident and emergency departments and acute hospitals. ScotSID also throws up the fact that, at the time of death, many people are receiving some form of medication that is used in the treatment of mental illness. We have therefore set out commitments on ways in which the NHS can focus on effective treatment that brings benefits to patients.

Analysis from the confidential inquiry has already informed safety improvements for patients, prioritised attention to follow-up for patients after discharge from hospital and supported a focus on actions to tackle problems around drinking and drug use. We have a strong, internationally recognised research community in Scotland, which stands us in good stead as we move forward with the aim of continually improving the evidence base on suicide and on how we can support people who are at risk.

Like the choose life strategy, the new strategy has a strong focus on services, but it is not intended to replace existing population-based health work that many people and agencies have been doing to help prevent suicide in Scotland. We expect many of the elements of the suicide prevention action plan that is set out in the strategy to continue alongside the work that is already taking place as part of the choose life legacy. Indeed, one commitment in the new strategy is that NHS Health Scotland will continue to host the choose life programme. The national programme will, among other responsibilities, continue to provide leadership and direction to local choose life co-ordinators. We are committed to working closely with NHS Health Scotland, the see me campaign and other agencies to develop an engagement strategy to influence public perception about suicide and the stigma surrounding it.

The way in which we talk about suicide is important. We know that talking openly about suicide in a responsible manner saves lives. We have adopted that approach through the choose life campaigns—"Suicide. Don't hide it. Talk about it" and "Read between the lines"—and we will continue to campaign in that way during the period covered by the new strategy. It is also important to continue to challenge the media misconceptions that sometimes still arise about suicide and suicide numbers and rates in Scotland.

Suicide prevention remains a significant challenge, but progress over the past several years has been encouraging. We are proud of what we have achieved collectively so far in Scotland in improving the population's mental health and services for people who experience mental illness, and in significantly reducing the suicide rate. Our new suicide prevention strategy reflects the high priority that we attach to that

agenda. The strategy reflects a changing landscape, but we still need to ensure that we have the right commitment and energy to implement it and to continue to make progress. The strategy builds on existing successful suicide prevention work and sets out new commitments that are based on emerging evidence on the risk factors that are associated with suicide.

I look forward to seeing further progress being made in the coming years. I know that practitioners and others across numerous services and agencies will continue to approach the work with the dedication and commitment that they have shown in recent years. I am confident that we in the Parliament have a shared objective of continued improvement in suicide prevention in Scotland, and I have no doubt that all members will want to support our aim of achieving that objective.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the pain experienced by families and friends who have lost loved ones through the tragedy of suicide; notes the significant progress that has been made in recent years in suicide prevention, with an overall decrease of 18% in the suicide rate in the last decade, and in supporting people who have been bereaved through suicide; agrees that there is still work to be done to reduce suicides further, and therefore welcomes the publication of the new *Suicide Prevention Strategy 2013-2016*, which builds on previous and continuing work and establishes the priorities and actions for suicide prevention over the next three years in support of a healthier and fairer Scotland.

14:59

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Suicide affects far too many families and communities throughout the world. It is reported that an astonishing 1 million people commit suicide every year. That is one every 40 seconds—more than all the world's murders and wars combined. There are, of course, many reasons why people decide to take their own life but, whatever they are, the fact that 1 million avoidable deaths take place through suicide every year is a truly shocking statistic.

I echo the sentiments of the minister and the Scottish Government that much work needs to be done. Therefore, I welcome the new suicide prevention strategy that the Government is introducing. I hope that it will build on the good work already being carried out by the likes of the choose life programme and various other programmes in which local authorities, health boards, communities and many other agencies are involved.

Prevention is the key to all activity and informs the new national strategy. However, in forming any prevention strategy, we must be fully aware of the facts and figures so that we can target resources effectively. For example, we need to know why

men are nearly three times more likely than women to take their own life. We need to understand that the most vulnerable group is men between the ages of 35 and 44. However, men aged 25 to 34 and 45 to 54 also appear to be highly vulnerable.

I find the socioeconomics of the matter stark. There is a very strong correlation between suicide rates and levels of social and economic deprivation. Between 2008 and 2012, the age-standardised rate was more than four times higher in the most deprived 10th of the population than in the least deprived 10th.

I have to say that, with income levels falling, welfare changes and the general thrust of austerity, desperation can and does creep into people's lives when they are on the breadline. The Samaritans report "Men and Suicide: Why it's a social issue" points to an increased risk as income goes down, as well as to an increased risk in groups with poor education and among unskilled manual workers and social housing tenants.

I will make one other point on statistics. I note that the figures in the motion and the Government's new strategy state that there has been an 18 per cent reduction in the suicide rate in the past 10 years. However, I looked at local authority figures prior to the debate and it appears that there is a difference between the headline figure in the strategy and the local authority figures. Perhaps, in his closing speech or after the debate, the minister could clarify the difference between what is in the strategy and the figures that local authorities produced. I make that not as a political point but as a point of clarification.

Beyond the statistics, we need to focus and refocus on prevention and on targeting people and groups in the communities where they live. As members would expect, there are many sources of information and analysis on the subject. The report to which I referred—"Men and Suicide: Why it's a social issue"—highlights a number of points, but the socioeconomic dimension jumps out. We need to address the fact that suicide figures are significantly higher in the communities that I mentioned.

As a general rule, the poorer someone is, the more likely they are to self-harm. At a basic level, if someone lives in poor housing, has a very low income, is under financial pressure and does not have support systems around them, and if their life seems devoid of hope, it is unsurprising but nevertheless upsetting that they might take the appalling option of suicide.

For other people, major events or changes in their life are the trigger. That could be job loss, relationship breakdown, the death of a friend or loved one or a change in physical health or mental

wellbeing. The Samaritans report points to a number of factors that contribute to the high figures. The main ones are whether they are male, their background, personality traits and emotional literacy and mid-life challenges. Those are issues that any strategy must recognise and address.

Of course, we must draw people out to enable them to share their feelings and concerns. I am sure that we would all recognise that we Scots are not the best at talking about our personal difficulties. We may be free with our moans about the weather, the national football team, physical ailments or the after-effects of a good night out, but we are much more reticent when it comes to our inner feelings, emotions and what is going on inside our heads. We do not tend to share those feelings. Often, the last people we are willing to share our troubles with are the very people who can help us most: the people we live and work with and the people we love and care most about. There are many attractive things about our national character but that is a part of it that we have to change quickly because, for far too many of our fellow Scots, those troubled feelings, which are often caused by major events or experiences in their lives, cause them to self-harm or suicide. Of course, we need to develop platforms to help people to open up, and I hope that the Government's strategy helps to ensure that that will happen.

I want to finish by giving voice to someone who has been affected by suicide and who is a relative of one of the 3,904 suicides in Scotland over the past five years. This person, who is a friend of mine, told me this week about his family's experience, and I said that I would relay what he said to the Parliament.

He said that the issue of mental health problems needs to be publicised more on television and online and in newspapers, magazines and the general media. He said that such awareness raising is important but that brief, infrequent adverts are never going to be enough. The first port of call must be to ensure that ordinary people—family and friends—can spot the signs that there are problems and know what they are. More awareness raising through the media would help, and I am grateful that the strategy points to greater use of social media.

He also said that the health service must get away from attempting a quick fix by prescribing pills for mental health conditions such as depression rather than taking a longer-term approach, and that mental health services have to be more effective and accessible. That is still not happening. It takes months for a client to see someone and, when they manage to do so, the number of sessions that they are allowed is restricted.

He also said that his family had great support from the charity Touched by Suicide Scotland, which runs eight self-help groups and works in five different council areas. It has expressed frustration at the different ways in which it is treated by local authorities. Some are very supportive but others appear to completely fail to recognise the support needed by individuals who are bereaved by suicide.

On awareness training, the charity urges us to go much further and make the focus of training much wider than previously, when it has been mainly on health service staff. Of course, GPs, nurses, health visitors and so on need training, but we also need to train housing officers, benefits staff, advice workers, shop stewards, bar staff and people who work in bookmakers, bingo halls and the like, because they will come into contact with people who may be at risk of self-harm. I hope that, under commitment 2 of the strategy, training will be considered for those groups of workers.

Touched by Suicide also expresses concern about support for children and young people who are at risk of suicide and says that not enough is being done in schools and colleges. It says that, if a child is at risk of suicide and is classed as priority, the quickest timescale for them to be seen by someone is within five days, which can often be too long. It raises concern about funding being a big problem for small organisations that support people who have been bereaved by suicide. If they support people in different areas, they often have to submit multiple applications for funding in each of the geographical areas that they work in.

Five years ago, when I was a councillor, six constituents in my ward took their own lives in an 18-month to two-year period. Six lives wasted, six families shattered and communities devastated. I hope that the strategy has the impact that it is designed to have. I speak regularly to the friends and family of those six people. They never forget, and they never stop saying one word: "Why?"

15:09

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): It is customary in most debates to begin by welcoming the issue that has been brought to the chamber for discussion. However, for far too long people have shied away from discussing suicide. It has been seen as something not to be talked about because of a sense of awkwardness or difficulty in accepting how an individual's life has ended.

It is also probably right to say that the situation was even starker in previous years, when families in particular felt acute embarrassment, indeed shame, if a family member took their own life. No support networks, such as that of the excellent

Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland, were in place to help families to cope with their loss, and the stigma of suicide was prevalent in society. Even a survivor of suicide—someone whose attempt had failed—was not given the necessary help that is available today.

In July 1958, Lionel Henry Churchill from Cheltenham was found in bed with a bullet wound in his forehead, having tried to take his life following the death from natural causes of his beloved wife. He lived, but instead of the medical treatment and care that he needed, he was sentenced to six months' imprisonment. It is remarkable to consider that, until just over 50 years ago, suicide, or "self-murder" as it was called, was a criminal act in Britain.

Thankfully, we have moved on from those times but we still have a long way to go. That is why I very much welcome the Scottish Government's suicide prevention strategy. As we have heard, the strategy was developed after many discussions with a large number of stakeholders. It was launched last month and puts in place measures for the next three years, focusing on five areas of importance.

I return to my opening remarks and stress the value of talking about suicide, not only to deal with the after-effects of the death of a loved one but as a first step to stop someone seeing suicide as the only option. I am encouraged to see that, in a prominent suicide spot in the centre of my city, Aberdeen, a phone number for the Samaritans is available so that anyone contemplating the act can speak to someone about their intention before it is too late.

The theme of discussion is at the core of the strategy and I believe that it is central to breaking the taboo of suicide. By discussing suicide in a responsible manner, we can save lives. I pay tribute to NHS Scotland and its choose life action plan for developing the "Suicide. Don't hide it. Talk about it" campaign some years ago. The campaign directed people to listening charities such as the Samaritans, and to breathing space, which is now in its 10th year as a national phonenumber service. Next week marks breathing space day 2014, whose message is "Stay connected". I was interested to learn that the campaign is aimed not only at those who are vulnerable or at risk of suicide but at everyone, by asking us to keep in touch with friends or family by picking up the phone or, for those more adept at it, sending a text message. I encourage everyone to take that advice by taking time out on 1 February to talk to a loved one.

The strategy highlights the benefit of communication through social media and the wider internet in promoting the key message of suicide prevention. However, it also refers to the

possible negative impact of such media, especially on those who are most susceptible to and likely to have suicidal tendencies. In that respect, I am sure that I speak for many who have concerns about web-based chat rooms and webcams, Facebook, Twitter and all the other online outlets that are available, particularly to teenagers and young adults, who use them the most.

The relatively new problem of cyberbullying can have tragic and devastating consequences. Figures obtained under freedom of information legislation by my colleague Ruth Davidson just before Christmas showed that in the past three years more than 500 pupils throughout Scotland had been victims of cyberbullying; the actual figure may be higher. Anonymous comments, threats, lies and hurtful insults online can lead to low self-esteem and, very sadly, in extreme cases, to suicide. We will all be aware of the tragic case last summer of the Fife teenager who took his own life after internet bullying and blackmail. I wonder what measures could be put in place to ensure that a terrible event like that does not happen again. Although I accept that the strategy cannot cover all areas, I ask the minister whether he can provide more detail about how he thinks the strategy's preventative approach to suicide fits in with tackling the specific problem of cyberbullying.

Elsewhere in the strategy document, theme D looks at how we can develop an evidence base to give the NHS and all the other agencies a better understanding of why certain people are inclined towards suicide. I very much welcome that approach, as preventing and thereby reducing incidents of suicide requires on-going analysis, research and the evaluation of information from ScotSID and the national confidential inquiry into suicide and homicide. I particularly welcome the Government's decision to examine the effectiveness of treatment for patients who experience mental distress and to investigate further the effects of drug and alcohol abuse as potential precursors of susceptibility to suicide.

The document draws attention to the fact that in Scotland almost three quarters of suicides were men, of whom 48 per cent were in the age range 35 to 54. For theme D to succeed, analysis needs to be undertaken that identifies other areas that have a causal link to suicide in addition to depression and mental ill health issues as factors. Financial or job worries, relationship breakdown, stress, bereavement and so on can all contribute to suicidal feelings in men in that age range. I would like to see more focused scrutiny of specific groups in which there is a preponderance of suicide.

To give just one example, the minister will be aware that in the past 30 years there has been a higher than average rate of suicide in male

farmers and farm workers in Scotland, with 86 deaths between 1981 and 1999, in comparison with 60 in fishing and its associated industries over the same period. Various factors can be cited for those statistics, such as changing farming practices, economic difficulties and geographical isolation. Farmers' specific needs and, often, their remoteness from support networks and medical treatment hinder early diagnosis of depression and mental illness. Measures to prevent suicide must be examined.

In his introduction to the strategy document, the minister rightly pays tribute to all those who have worked in suicide prevention, which has resulted in a downward trend in suicides over the past 10 years in Scotland. However, he ends on a note of caution—that we cannot be complacent—and says that “commitment and energy” are still required if we are to continue to make progress. I most definitely agree with that, and I commend the minister and his team for their work so far.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Many thanks. We move to the open debate. We have ample time for interventions and I look forward to those things happening.

15:17

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): Most of us who speak in this debate probably know or know of someone in their community—perhaps even in their family—who has committed suicide. The loss of a loved one is devastating enough for any family to cope with, but to discover that the loss came about as a result of suicide must pile on more anguish to those who remain. Families who suffer that sometimes blame themselves and wonder whether they could have been more vigilant. Could they have spotted any warning signs and done anything to prevent it? With the natural grief over the loss of a family member comes the additional stress of asking whether a loved one's suicide was preventable.

Cases that I have been aware of over the years often had something in common, which was the total surprise of the family: there seemed to be no indication or warning signs of what was to happen. Therefore, any strategy to reduce the number of suicides in Scotland must offer some guidance to help families spot the potential dangers, and I recognise that the new strategy does that in several ways. Although we often rely on our dedicated professionals in the health and mental health services to assist us with this problem, families can play a vital role in noticing a family member's changing patterns of behaviour. I will talk about that in more detail later.

If we look at some of the statistics, as the minister did in his opening speech, we see that there were 762 probable suicides in Scotland in 2012—about two every day, which is quite a sobering thought. In the 2012 statistical report covering suicide information, three quarters of suicides were males and about half were aged between 25 and 54. People who lived in the most deprived communities in Scotland were three times more likely to commit suicide than those in the most affluent parts of our country. Interestingly, two thirds of those who committed suicide were in employment and over half had had mental health prescriptions dispensed to them in the 12 months prior to their death.

In comparison with the rest of the United Kingdom countries, Scotland's male suicide rates are significantly higher—73 per cent higher—and female rates are almost double. Both have remained above the western European mean since the early 1990s. Despite the gloomy figures, there is encouragement as the trends are markedly downwards; as the minister said, the overall figure has fallen by about 18 per cent in the past 10 years. Indeed, the figures are at their lowest level since those days in the early 1990s.

Much of the good work started in 2002 with the choose life programme, which was recognised as a leader in the field. The steady decline in suicide rates from that time is a testament to the success of the public awareness approach that was adopted. The introduction in 2008 of suicide prevention awareness training for NHS front-line staff has built on that success. The strategy that we are talking about is a natural progression of the approaches that have been working over time.

We do not need to look too far to identify some of the probable causes of suicide, with mental illness, alcohol and drug abuse, poverty, family break-ups and financial problems all playing some part. As the minister said in December 2013, we have made progress, but we need to keep reaching out to those who are at risk and focus our attention on where the evidence takes us. Suicide is preventable and we can reduce the number of tragedies that families face each year.

I was interested to listen to this morning's Radio Scotland programme on depression as part of its mental health season, in which several callers expressed the need for people to be able to talk to someone at any point in a day when depression strikes. What are the possible warning signs? I have mentioned families who said that they did not notice any changing patterns of behaviour with their loved ones. I am aware of a local case in which a person simply left home one day, with no apparent signs of what was to come, and did not return.

Neil Findlay mentioned some of the causes of suicide. Perhaps some of the symptoms were those that were kindly posted on one of the NHS choices websites, which provides very useful help to families. They included feelings of hopelessness; episodes of sudden rage and anger; reckless acts with no apparent concern for the consequences; feeling trapped; starting to abuse or more frequently use drugs or alcohol; noticeable weight changes due to changes in appetite; people becoming increasingly withdrawn from friends, family and society; an inability to sleep, or sleeping all the time; and—this one might occur to families—someone suddenly beginning to put their affairs in order by sorting out possessions or making a will.

It is sad, but families might recognise those symptoms only after the event because in our busy day-to-day lives we may not think anything of such potential warnings. That is not to say that those are all causes to set the alarm bells ringing, but the advice from the NHS is to engage a person and encourage them to talk about how they are feeling and to share any concerns with a GP or a person's care team, particularly if they are being treated for a mental health condition.

I expect that other members will develop the key elements in the strategy, but the particular emphasis on more direct engagement with families and carers, more work to tackle stigma and discrimination and deploying technology to provide people with more helpful information will, I hope, improve matters even further in the coming years.

The Scottish Government's strategy for preventing suicide develops and builds on the very successful choose life programme that has seen a significant drop in the awful statistics. The public have been closely involved in developing the strategy further and I am sure that more gains will be made. Helping families and health workers to spot potential warning signs and providing the support mechanisms for those who are at risk will go some way towards reducing further the number of suicides, which, as the minister said, are entirely preventable.

15:24

Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab): I am grateful to members who have shared their knowledge on the subject but, like Nanette Milne, I, too, am not content that we need to discuss this issue and recognise that we do so with great sadness. It would be far better if we as a nation did not have to face the on-going experience of suicide as has been described. In that sense, we face a tremendous battle.

It has been alluded to that we have faced nearly 4,000 such deaths in Scotland over the past five years. I am sure that each of those deaths has left behind heartbreak and a legacy for those who have been involved. In that context, I welcome what the minister said and the strategy that has been outlined in "Suicide Prevention Strategy 2013-2016".

The introduction to "Suicide Prevention Strategy 2013-2016" lays out definitions of self-harm, suicidal behaviour and suicide. Members' experiences and observations identify that among the priorities that we face is focusing on the early signs of behaviours that could eventually lead to suicide or an attempt at suicide. Those who have engaged in self-harm and suicidal behaviour deserve our support at an early stage, and there should be early intervention of some value if we are to go further in reducing the suicide rate.

I think that we all accept that it is not only suicides themselves who are the focus of our concerns. Around every such event, families and friends are left to question how it occurred, and our society is left bereft of the contribution that could otherwise have been made. Indeed, in many circumstances, witnesses are left behind devastated by the experience.

Many statistics have rightly been mentioned. Almost every day somewhere in the United Kingdom, someone steps on to a railway line and commits suicide. That has an obvious impact on not only their family and friends but the poor train driver who was in the train on that date. The ramifications of each of those circumstances are severe and for all of us to consider.

Some of us who had no knowledge of those circumstances earlier in life often heard that the act was selfish and required more consideration. Suicide leaves behind chaos, guilt—we heard about that earlier—in families that feel that they have some responsibility in some way, and a notion of blame needing to be asserted. Thankfully, we have, I think, come to understand that the whole circumstance is based essentially on illness, pressure and an inability to see a way forward. For many, that is not understandable, but nevertheless it is so prevalent that we can come to know that human beings can feel that the only way forward is to take their own life. I do not think that we can too often consider and try to respond to the sadness and impact of that.

On the circumstances that lie behind suicide, there is, no doubt, as Willie Coffey mentioned earlier, a propensity in Scotland to commit suicide, particularly among males, that is not seen elsewhere in western Europe. Obviously, alcohol and substance abuse have some impact. We are all aware of the levels of alcohol and substance abuse in Scotland. Joblessness and poverty have

been mentioned, and bad debt is a factor. Hopelessness and sometimes homelessness lie behind suicide. Our thanks are no doubt due to NHS Scotland, the Samaritans, Breathing Space, the Salvation Army and many third sector groups that work tirelessly in that regard.

For the future, education is obviously of great significance in the strategy when it comes to understanding some of the early signs and recognising the pressures that individuals face. Talking about the issues and getting things out there into the public domain are increasingly important. Knowledge in the workplace is also important, because signs can be seen there. Workers should be educated to know that colleagues are under pressure; steps can then be taken.

The issue is very sensitive. Signs can be misread, but it is far better to take steps to help each other than to step aside and say in the Scottish way, "Let's not be nosey about our pals' interests or our neighbours' futures." We should step in and at least show kindness and an interest.

Also, social events in Scotland such as football matches, where male sensitivities are put aside, and pop concerts and the like are places to advertise the fact that there is a problem, which is almost unspoken until one experiences it at first hand. Identification is an important issue.

Equally important, as has been alluded to, are the real-time responses. I, too, listened to the radio this morning, and it became self-evident that when people need help they need it immediately and they need someone to speak to. Although the Samaritans are a great support, more needs to be done in that regard. I am sure that the minister will give thought to that.

Mention has been made of the use of sport and recreation to get people out into the open air and involved in groups. Although that is not part of an NHS strategy, one hopes that the minister can give us some insight into the co-operative work that is going on in the partnerships that we always talk about to deliver alternative solutions to our problems.

Monitoring and constant reassessment of the strategy will be significant in the years ahead. I am pleased to hear that there is no complacency regarding the falls in numbers and that they are not, in themselves, being seen as the achievement of success. One life saved is something that we should laud and be pleased about, but we want to try to save all these lives for the future. In that context, I welcome the 11 commitments that are outlined in the document and encourage the minister to do more as the evidence presents itself.

15:34

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): I pay tribute to the organisations out there that are doing a huge amount of work in tackling mental health stigma and in trying to prevent suicide—organisations such as the Scottish Association for Mental Health, the choose life programme co-ordinators and volunteers across the country and the Samaritans, who have been mentioned quite a lot in the debate. Many of us recently had the privilege of meeting Samaritans from throughout Scotland who are doing immense work, in my community in Aberdeen and elsewhere.

In its briefing for the debate, SAMH asks a number of questions that I have asked myself in a previous guise as a local councillor. It asks the Scottish Government how it will ensure that local authorities and community planning partnerships are held to account for the suicide prevention work that they are obliged to carry out under single outcome agreements. SAMH calls for more transparency from local authorities and others in pointing out what they are doing. I think that that is required. I am convinced that a lot of good work is going on, but it is a subject that we do not talk enough about. We talk about relatives and friends who die of natural causes, but folk often do not talk about those folk that they have known who have taken their own lives. We must get much better at doing that.

We also have an obligation to challenge behaviour. Far too often in society—in the media, in particular—we see a stigmatisation of mental ill health. We have seen headlines galore, over many years, using language that should not be used to describe folk with mental health problems. All of us here and beyond should challenge such behaviour. We now have the new media—the social media—which Dr Milne talked about, and we see a huge amount of bullying and horrid language there.

Before the debate, I looked at some recent cases of suicide. Dr Milne mentioned the young man from Dunfermline who, after being blackmailed after using the internet, could see no way out other than to take his own life. There are countless stories out there, but one that I was really struck by had the headline, "Ballet girl was 'hooked on Tumblr where users encouraged her to harm herself'". That is beyond my ken—why would anyone do that? However, it is obvious that such behaviour goes on. That girl took her own life. We should look at ensuring that social media sites are not used to bully folk and to leave them with what they think is very little option, and I think that we can do that.

A BBC Scotland report from 22 June 2012 had the headline, "Social media 'could cut suicide'". It

said that, in a study by the University of Stirling in 2009,

“one in five school children said the internet, including social networking sites, influenced their decision to self-harm.”

It went on to say:

“Now the researchers say the possible dangers posed by new media could be counteracted if the sites provided support for vulnerable young people.”

In that report, Professor Rory O'Connor of the University of Stirling's suicidal behaviour research laboratory is quoted as saying that

“The reasons for adolescent suicide and self-harm are multiple and complex. My colleagues and I see that the challenge is ensuring that new media provide support for vulnerable young people, rather than helping or encouraging self-destructive behaviours.”

I am pleased that organisations such as SAMH and the Samaritans now have a presence on Twitter, Facebook and other new media sites, because I think that that can be immensely beneficial. Interaction with such organisations on new media sites is often helpful for people who may have some dark thoughts.

The difference between the suicide rate among the poor and that among the more affluent members of society has been mentioned. Mr Coffey said that the suicide rate in the most deprived areas was more than three times higher than the rate in more affluent areas. One of my main concerns is welfare reform and the austerity measures that are being implemented under the direction of the Westminster Government. As many other members probably do, I regularly have folk come to me who feel despair, isolation and a lack of self-worth, because of the changes that have been thrust on them. We need to take cognisance of the impact of the welfare reforms on people's mental wellbeing, and we must ensure that we do the right thing in that regard by doing all that we can to help folk who have been affected in that way. In my opinion, the best way of dealing with that would be to halt the austerity measures and to stop the worst impacts of welfare reform, and I hope that that will be possible in the very near future.

15:39

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Dr Sir Thomas Browne created the word “suicide” meaning “to kill oneself” in the 17th century, but it has always been with us.

The early Christian church exalted self-sacrifice and martyrdom, yet by the middle ages the church would dissuade people from committing suicide by preaching damnation, and people who had committed suicide were often denied a Christian burial, hung in chains, impaled on a stake or

disembowelled. Thankfully, the modern faith and secular worlds are much more enlightened in their approach to suicide.

My own family has suffered from suicide. My great-grandmother drowned herself in the River Shannon, and an uncle burned himself to death in his car. A cousin in the 1960s often came home from school to find his mother attempting self-destruction by putting her head in the oven or standing on the window ledge; at 10, he found her strangled by the washing line. In this debate, therefore, I will focus not on the wish to die of the terminally ill or of those who are in permanent pain without quality of life, which I believe will be debated another day, but on the suicide of despair by people who see little hope in their own life now or ever.

Suicide can destroy the future because of a failed exam, a broken relationship or a loss of home or job that someone cannot see past but which the passage of time would surely have resolved. Studies show that the children of suicides are more likely to kill themselves, as are members of the immediate family and close friends, inflicting, as some have argued, a posthumous homicide. In the past 45 years, there has been a 60 per cent increase in the incidence of suicide worldwide. As Neil Findlay pointed out, between 800,000 and 1 million people kill themselves in the world every year now; every one of them is, of course, a tragedy.

Scotland has not been immune from the global trend, as we have heard in the debate. The latest study from the Prince's Trust revealed that a third of young unemployed people had considered suicide and that 9 per cent felt that they have nothing to live for. Furthermore, the rate of suicide is three times higher in the most deprived populations of Scotland than in the general population. The decline in living standards is therefore something that must be considered as we look at the matter and attempt to establish a strategy towards preventing suicide.

We have heard in the debate of suicide's devastating impact on families and communities and of efforts to tackle the issue, but it is important to remember that specific groups in society are more at risk of suicide, and it is wise to focus on assisting those groups where possible. Of course, not all groups who suffer from suicide are deprived. As Nanette Milne said, there is a higher instance of suicide among farmers; there is also a higher rate among doctors, nurses and veterinarians. One might consider that access to the means of suicide is another reason for it.

Veterans of the armed forces form another group whose rate of suicide is higher than that of the wider population, for reasons that include difficulty in adapting to life outside the forces, living

with the trauma of conflict or suffering from mental and physical problems related to time in service. I am therefore pleased that Scotland is the first nation in the UK to appoint a veterans commissioner to work with charities, local authorities and health boards to identify public services that might provide greater support to veterans. That commitment will complement the £1.4 million annual funding from the Scottish Government for specialist mental health and community outreach services provided by Combat Stress to help veterans who need support.

As deputy convener of the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse, I know that people with a history of childhood sexual abuse have a greater likelihood of suicide. The “Beyond Trauma” study by Dr Sarah Nelson of the University of Edinburgh focused specifically on the mental health needs of female survivors, half of whom revealed that they had tried, sometimes repeatedly, to kill themselves. In an NHS Lothian needs assessment of adult male survivors of childhood sexual abuse, it was found that male suicidal behaviour was even more acute than that in female survivors, with most male survivors having attempted suicide—again, often on several occasions. Very often, survivors of childhood sexual abuse not only have to live with their experiences but they struggle with addictions that are developed as a result of them. As is pointed out in the suicide prevention strategy, substance abuse often increases the likelihood of an individual attempting to take their life, making that group, too, particularly vulnerable.

Often, the best way for survivors to rebuild their lives is to discuss their experiences, understand what happened to them, know that they are not alone and rediscover their self-esteem and trust in others. Organisations across the country support survivors of childhood sexual abuse and carry out vital work to help those who are most in need tackle their problems as a result of trauma. I am pleased that Survivor Scotland was allocated £1.65 million from the Scottish Government between 2012 and 2014 to fund a variety of projects to continue that invaluable work, as individuals who are at risk of suicidal behaviour require continued support to ensure that they do not end their lives.

A couple of years ago, I chaired a Samaritans and University of Edinburgh seminar here in the Parliament on the media impact of suicide. The National Union of Journalists attended the seminar and it must be commended for its serious approach to suicide prevention, encouraging as it does journalists to report suicide sensitively, as sensationalist coverage or reporting that appears to glorify or romanticise suicide can lead to many more copycat suicides.

Although suicide clusters thankfully remain rare, they can have a devastating impact on local areas. To see that, we need only cast our minds back a few years to the tragic events in Bridgend in south Wales, where dozens of teenagers and young adults committed suicide in the space of a few short years. At the time, many people blamed sensational and excessive media coverage of those tragedies for the increased number of suicides. In 2010, the police asked the media to cease reporting on them in an effort to deter copycats, and eventually the trend subsided. The continued dialogue between the NUJ and the Scottish Government is welcome, as are efforts to ensure that there is sensitive reporting on mental health issues and suicide through the publication of practical guidelines and journalist training.

Kevin Stewart: I am glad that Mr Gibson talked about the inroads that have been made in relation to reporting. There are a huge number of responsible journalists out there. However, one thing that is little discussed is the way in which folks with mental health difficulties are often portrayed in entertainment programmes such as “The X Factor”. Does Mr Gibson agree that we should challenge the producers of those television programmes as well as the print media?

Kenneth Gibson: I have never watched that programme so I find it difficult to comment on that one in particular, but all stereotypes involving people with mental health issues should certainly be challenged if we are to have a much healthier society.

I have taken a great interest in this most tragic of subjects during my time in the Parliament. It has been encouraging to see the work that each and every Administration since devolution has done to reduce the number of suicides in Scotland, and to see such strong cross-party support for that work. It is clear that it is essential to take a comprehensive, far-reaching and national approach to suicide prevention, and I am pleased that all members are able to unite to provide the best outcomes for those individuals and families who most need our support.

15:46

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): I, too, welcome the publication of the Scottish Government’s new “Suicide Prevention Strategy 2013-2016”, and I commend the minister for providing us with this opportunity to debate its contents.

Suicide is an incredibly sensitive issue and one that must be treated as such by all of us across society. As Willie Coffey has already said, I dare say that most of us in the chamber will know of someone who has either committed or attempted

suicide. I know of more than one, unfortunately, and Kenny Gibson mentioned a few of his family members. It is hard to articulate just how much the friends and relatives of those concerned can suffer in the aftermath. It is important that we drive down the number of suicides in Scotland and that any framework that is put in place to achieve that aim is fit for purpose.

The latest strategy follows on from "Choose Life: A National Strategy and Action Plan to Prevent Suicide in Scotland", which was published in 2002, and it certainly builds on some of the successes of its predecessor. The 18 per cent reduction in suicides in Scotland and the fact that all probationer police officers and 50 per cent of front-line NHS staff are now trained in suicide prevention techniques provide a good platform on which to build.

I have highlighted in previous debates on mental health that it is vital that we end the spectre of patients being condemned to long-term repeat prescriptions for antidepressants without regular reviews of their response to the treatment. The strategy highlights how important it is that we make a concerted effort to change that, as it notes that,

"at the time of death, many people are receiving some form of medication used in the treatment of mental illness."

Perhaps something as simple as a review of their medication with a change to the dosage or the drug may have made a difference to their mood.

The minister will be well aware of the successful pilot that was held in Glasgow in which participating practices reviewed those who were on antidepressants for more than two years. It led to 28 per cent of patients having a change in their therapy and an 8 per cent reduction in prescribing costs. Reviews can make a difference, but I appreciate that the use of antidepressants is essential in many cases.

I was delighted to come across commitment 7 in the strategy, which reads:

"We will work with the Royal College of General Practitioners and other relevant stakeholders to develop approaches to ensure more regular review of those on long-term drug treatment for mental illness, to ensure that patients receive the safest and most appropriate treatment."

I welcome the inclusion of that important commitment in the strategy and I would be grateful if the minister provided in his summing-up a timeframe for engaging with stakeholders on working towards those much-needed reviews.

In 2008, the Scottish Government published "Equally Well: Report of the Ministerial Task Force on Inequalities", which makes recommendations on tackling health inequalities. It said that one of

the challenges that faced the ministerial task force was that

"Those living in the most deprived"

10 per cent of

"areas of Scotland have a suicide risk double that of the Scottish average."

I appreciate the mention of farmers and vets by Nanette Milne and Kenny Gibson. It is without doubt that the incidence of suicide among such people is high because they have access to the means of committing suicide.

I was disappointed that health inequalities merited only one fleeting mention in the suicide prevention strategy. The link between inequalities and greater rates of suicide is acknowledged in "Equally Well", and it merits greater inclusion in the overall discussion on preventing suicide.

Timely access to psychological therapies has a role to play in treating those with mental illness more effectively, and I hope that it would have the knock-on effect of reducing the number of suicides further. I therefore welcomed the target of access to psychological therapies within 18 weeks of referral as a positive step. However, I caution that, for someone who is suffering from mental anguish, 18 weeks is a long time to wait. Many such patients have of course suffered for some time before their referral. The minister should not limit his ambitions to 18 weeks.

The target is due for delivery by December, so this is not the time to move backwards. In September, there was a 3 per cent drop in the number who are being treated on time. One fifth have to wait more than 18 weeks for treatment, so the Scottish Government cannot rest on its laurels yet.

The head of psychological services in one health board told me that, alongside its counterparts in other areas, that board is constantly making the case for greater investment in mental health services. Yesterday, I visited Midpark hospital in Dumfries, which I know that the minister visited in 2012—I saw his signature in the visitors book. NHS boards are experiencing increasing demand for such services because of the economic downturn and—perhaps more positively—because the public are becoming much more aware of the services' availability.

I hope that we might be beginning to see some erosion of the stigma that has plagued mental health. The Scottish Government needs to continue to address that. It will also have to address the clear disparity that exists across Scotland in access to clinical and other applied psychologists. It cannot be right that, per head of population, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and NHS Fife have twice the number of psychologists

that NHS Forth Valley has. If the health improvement, efficiency and governance, access and treatment—HEAT—target is to be met later this year, access must be addressed urgently.

Suicide is difficult for those who are left to comprehend. I am glad that we are making progress with a decrease in suicides, and I look forward to much more progress in the near future.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Christine Grahame, who has a generous six minutes. After that, I will be happy to call James Dornan.

15:53

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I compliment the Parliament on discussing mental health and suicide prevention. In my long time in the Parliament, we seem to have raised those issues many times, which we have gone some way towards destigmatising. We have provided funding to the voluntary sector, which I will discuss later. It is refreshing to be in a debate that has been mostly—apart from a wee hit or two from Jim Hume—devoid of party politics and point scoring, which is as it should be.

I welcome the Government's suicide prevention strategy, which continues the earlier work on harm reduction, early intervention and destigmatising. I recognise the work that my colleague Kenneth Gibson has done, which he is humble about. In 1999, when I had no idea what he was talking about, he raised the issue of high suicide rates among young men. He has pursued the issue for years, and it is only those of us who have been in Parliament for 14 years who recall that. Kenny Gibson has kept to the subject, as others have done, for a very long time, and I compliment him on that, because we are catching up with him.

I want to focus on the third sector, which is important and informed because of its grassroots contribution, as is illustrated in my constituency, where face-to-face help is provided. That is important, because there can be clever websites and clever things to do, but sometimes people just need someone right in front of them, with a cup of tea, to talk to and to listen to them. No website can provide that.

I also want to talk about the role of education in the campaign—raised by many members, but begun by Nanette Milne—for the responsible use of social media, which definitely has an increasing part to play.

Penumbra in my constituency promotes mental health and wellbeing, aiming to prevent mental ill health for people who are at risk. It provides support and practical, accessible help, based in the community and right in the middle of

Galashiels in big offices, which destigmatises the issue right away. The premises are cheery, with well-painted, fresh rooms and coffee and tea. That says something about mental health issues, which—if we are honest—we all know affect many people, including many friends and relations, at some time in their lives.

Health in Mind provides befriending services, offering six-monthly matches, operating initially in Midlothian and the Borders. Clients get six months with a befriender matched to them, to get them out and about, busy, out of the house and out of their cocoon. It helps them to get confident again with the outside world and to build their self-confidence and self-esteem, which can be so easily vanquished.

For anyone, redundancy can take away self-esteem with the click of their fingers, as can a broken relationship, when all the cockiness and self-esteem that they once had disappear. It can happen to anyone. The befriending services help to rebuild people's confidence so that they can cope with what many of us cope with every day without any problem—although we could all be there.

New Horizons, founded in 1993, is an informal meeting place and self-help group where people help one another to get through their problems. It even leads to romance. It led to a marriage—I met the couple who had met there and then married.

As a side issue, the bedroom tax affects people with mental health problems. One of the members at New Horizons told me that she cannot share a home because of her mental health condition but that she was being asked to have someone else in the spare room or be taxed on it.

Together, those charities play a collective role not only with one another but by contributing to the planning of mental health services across the Scottish Borders. In Midlothian, we have midspace, the online mental health and wellbeing information service for people who want to know where to go for services. It points them in different directions for treatment and care. Other members have mentioned SAMH, which in my area is focusing on employability, which is important.

While I am on the subject, let me point out that it is extremely difficult for somebody with mental health issues to disclose them to an employer. They do not want to put it in a form or mention it; they can say that they have had chicken pox, but they will not say that they have had a breakdown at some point in the past, because they fear that they will be written off and not be able to pursue their career any more. There are still issues with employers.

Not all who may commit suicide are mentally in a position to access services, as I have said;

neither are they identified by the system earlier on. Out of the blue, somebody can commit suicide triggered by redundancy, the end of a relationship, failing an exam or not getting the marks that they thought they would get. There can be no warning.

I move on to the role of education. We have dealt with that, to some extent, in relation to social media, where there can be venomous bullying and distressing attacks on Facebook or in blogs and tweets. As has been said before, there have been highly publicised examples of individuals who committed suicide substantially as a consequence of online comments. We know that it is the bad things that are said about us that we keep reading.

The nasty things are the ones that we cannot get out of our heads in the middle of the dark night when we remember a horrible comment that we have read. Do not look at those comments on the internet about me, by the way. They are there; they are there about us all. The nasty ones are the ones that we keep picking at, so if someone is vulnerable, they are the ones that they will remember. They bite into our souls.

Lewis Thelwall, aged 19, of Port Talbot was bullied to his death because false rumours were put on the internet about him. He was vulnerable so he took the comments to heart and killed himself.

In Fife, 17-year-old Daniel Perry became involved, in his innocence, in a scam. He was threatened with blackmail. People—anonymous users—on the social media website ask.fm actually urged him to kill himself. The same website had been linked to other youngsters' deaths. He was sent messages saying:

“you need to let a blade meet your throat”.

Who are these people that put such things online? Daniel was warned that he would be better off dead if he did not transfer the cash. Of course, he took the warnings to heart and he hid everything from his family. The thing is that his mother said:

“He was not the type of person who let things get him down”.

Presiding Officer, I was told that I had a generous six minutes. Do I still have time left?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): Yes.

Christine Grahame: I ask the minister, who has indicated the issues that he is dealing with, why the ministers for education and children are not also involved in the mental health strategy. I want education to be included in the suicide prevention strategy. I know that some schools deal with Facebook, sexting and tweeting and all that, but others do not.

I know that we all think that we are clever clogs at technology but we are way behind youngsters. Why are we not in schools and looking at responsible use of the internet? That has implications for those who put things on the internet, because they will be there for ever—when they go out to look for a job, the things that they have said and done online will still be there—and it has consequences that other people might regret for the rest of their lives if they are party to actions that lead to someone else taking their life.

I therefore ask the Minister for Public Health to advise in his summing-up whether he is discussing these particular issues with the ministers responsible for education and children.

16:02

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): I was not going to take part in the debate but, with your indulgence Presiding Officer, I will make a short contribution.

Some members have already raised the point about a preponderance of males aged between 35 and 54 committing suicide. If it is not altogether understandable, we can see why people in that group might feel the most pressure. People reach an age at which they feel that they should have achieved something. They might well have done so, but in their minds they have not and they feel disappointment and pressure. That pressure might not come from outside; an individual might feel inside that he should have done something that he has not managed to do, despite the fact that he might be a very successful businessman or successful at something else.

Other people do not see that pressure that those people are feeling. Christine Grahame talked about Daniel Perry's mother saying that he did not let things get to him. Often, other people do not know who we are. It might look as though we are coasting through life and everything is hunky-dory, but it could take just one thing to trigger a devastating action.

I do not think that those who are left behind are part of the Government's suicide prevention strategy. Suicide might be a tragedy for a small group of people, but it can have a larger effect. I know of someone who found their friend who had committed suicide by using a hose on an exhaust pipe. Three days after he had gone missing, his friend found him. It happened a long time ago now, but the vision lives with his friend to this day. He has suffered mental health issues that were based on the stress that finding his friend caused.

Although it is important to have some sort of prevention strategy, suicide is sometimes not preventable—sometimes we just do not see it coming—and those who suffer because of the act

of the person who has committed suicide need to be protected.

It is great to see the Government dealing with the stigma of mental ill health, and I congratulate the Government on the suicide prevention strategy and the work that it has done up to this point.

Many speakers have mentioned online attacks. It used to be that, when someone slagged someone else off, they slagged them to their face, or they might have sent a poison pen letter. An individual can now be publicly ridiculed for no reason whatsoever, and they do not even know who the people are so there is nothing that they can do. They cannot defend themselves against it. People retweet things and jump on any bandwagon. That individual then feels as though they are being assailed from all sides. They feel helpless and they feel useless and that is when they get to the stage of considering suicide.

It is important to note that the strategy will help in many ways, but it will not help in every way because people cannot always tell. Families can look after somebody and they are the ones who think that they know that person the best, but they are the ones who are the most shocked when that final action is taken.

I have seen a number of people who have suffered from this. Kevin Stewart talked earlier about people coming to see him. In the past six months, I have had a number of people coming in to my office who have attempted suicide and have talked about attempting it. One 17-year-old girl had tried to kill herself three times in the space of six to eight weeks, so it is not just us middle-aged and elderly men who are committing suicide or attempted suicide; it is people in the young group, too. They are finding the pressure of life so difficult—they might be finding it difficult to get a job or to get that boyfriend or girlfriend they think they have to have to be cool. We need to keep in mind that it is small things that can trigger those huge actions.

I welcome the strategy. Everybody has to play their part in this: everybody has to look at their own family and to watch their own friends. If they see a change in a family member's or friend's behaviour, they need to take note of it. Somebody earlier on—I think that it was Neil Findlay—mentioned the macho issue and how Scots males are not very good at interacting with each other about our emotions. Sometimes we have to put that aside and just take a chance. If we think that somebody does not look right, we have to ask the question—we have to ask them what is wrong. If we do not, sometimes what happens is that we live to regret not asking them—we find that it is too late.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now turn to closing speeches. I remind members who participated in the debate that they should be in the chamber for closing speeches.

16:07

Jackson Carlaw (West Scotland) (Con): This is one of these debates to which we contribute as politicians wishing that we knew more about the subject—much more about the subject than any one of us probably does. Therefore, our contributions are all circumscribed by that fact.

To my surprise, we last touched on this topic—I can remember the debate quite clearly—on 24 January last year, when we spoke about mental health issues. I thought that the debate was much more recent than that. There were excellent speeches in that debate from many who have not contributed today—we heard then from Fiona McLeod, Malcolm Chisholm, Richard Simpson, Mary Scanlon, Dennis Robertson, Mary Fee and David Stewart.

In that earlier debate, when we were talking about mental health issues more generally, suicide became a feature of our discussion and at that point the SAMH two too many campaign was mentioned. Even though we are having this debate against a background of a falling number of those who are taking their own lives in Scotland, the two too many campaign illustrates that, each and every day, two people in Scotland take their own lives. In total, that is 14 deaths in every 100,000 against a European average of 16 deaths in every 100,000.

As Neil Findlay said, if we roll it all up into a global figure, the number of people who commit suicide is astonishing. It is not the norm but the exception, but it is against that background that we are seeking—through the strategy that I think all of us are very happy to support—to effectively understand why people commit suicide and to seek to reduce the number further.

Historically and in different cultures there have been different attitudes to suicide, but in Scotland it is a long time since it was a heroic act to defend a nation's wellbeing in war or since we had any correlation to some sort of old imperial Japanese code of conduct. I have to assume that, for most people, the decision to commit suicide is a bleak, cold and lonely one that is almost always taken for reasons about which our despair should match that of any unfortunate soul who contemplates such an end.

Let us understand the context that we will not eliminate suicide—I agree with James Dornan on that—but that we should pursue policies and actions that will continually militate against the reasons that drive people to thinking of it. In

Michael Matheson's foreword to the strategy document, he sums up the issue by saying simply:

"Every suicide is a tragedy that has a far reaching impact on family, friends and the community long after a person has died."

That is the general point that every member understands and which is at the heart of the tragedy.

During the debate, all sorts of reasons why people commit suicide have been advanced. As Kenny Gibson said, although he chose not to talk about it today, some people who are faced with some sort of medical prognosis decide that suicide is the right course. Others are driven by a breakdown in relationships or a radical change in fortunes, which might well be relationship driven or to do with careers or finance.

Some people are driven to suicide because they are different. On that issue, as a country, we can take considerable pride in the way in which our culture has changed, certainly since I was young. At that time, if someone was disabled, they could be the subject of ridicule or, if people were gay, that was to be disowned and denied, or worse. There were all manner of other social stigmas that drove people to suicide. As a society at large, we have moved on considerably and, I hope, not so many of those stigmas are now apparent.

Neil Findlay talked about Touched by Suicide, social groups and what we can do to assist people to be better able to develop the skills that will allow them to intuitively recognise those who are at risk. Nanette Milne talked about the impact and potential consequences of the web, which Kevin Stewart and Christine Grahame also touched on.

I am not being flippant when I say that my sons certainly receive lots of comments for being the sons of a Tory MSP, and they have learned to cope with that. It is incredible how many young people find themselves the subject of bullying that is driven by the actions of their parents or the perceptions of their parents. That has a wholly corrosive effect on some young people, but they can have a great reluctance to discuss that in the family, because they feel that in some way they are protecting their parent from what has been said about them. On some dreadful occasions, that has driven young people to suicide.

Kevin Stewart: I understand—I do not think that this is a Westminster myth—that, for a great number of years, the sons and daughters of newly elected MPs received a letter from the son of a previous MP about the difficulties that they would face and the pressures that they would be under because their parent had entered elected politics. Mr Carlaw's sons can obviously cope, but many families cannot. That is yet another area in which

some folks do not realise the damage that they are causing.

Jackson Carlaw: Potentially, within what Mr Stewart says is the germ of an idea that goes way beyond politicians. Children who have suffered might well be a source of information or support to others who find themselves in a similar situation.

Willie Coffey said that members will know of people who have committed suicide. I had not reflected on that until he said it, and I suddenly realised that my grandmother's sister, of whom I was enormously fond and who had a great influence in bringing me up as an infant, committed suicide. In fact, I was not told about that until I was in my 30s.

I also realised that another relative died in circumstances that I have never been able to determine and that I imagine were suspicious. They were of that age and time that Nanette Milne mentioned when nobody wanted to discuss suicide or admit to it. Also, a friend's wife committed suicide quite unexpectedly—she was the last person one would imagine would do that. The tragedy was that her husband then developed and died from lung cancer and left three adopted children. That is the sort of personal tragedy with which people are left to deal later on.

The minister obviously enjoys the support of all parties and all members, and we welcome the strategy. In his closing remarks, I would like him to tell us how he will ensure that there is a sustained effort to give focus to implementing the commitments in the strategy, to energise people and to ensure that the results are assessed. I would also like him to tell us how he will ensure the one-to-one-contact and the engagement that, together with the practical actions, underpin much of his strategy. That will obviously be beyond the strategy, but I would like to see further evidence of it contributing to additional reductions by which we all hope to see measurable progress.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have advised Parliament that I expect all members who have participated in debates to be present for closing speeches. I regret to note that Graeme Pearson is not present and I have not received an explanation.

16:16

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Like many other members, I find it difficult to imagine what drives people to suicide or, indeed, the anguish of family members who are faced with the suicide of a loved one. Therefore, I welcome the debate, because we are taking those issues seriously.

I also welcome the impact of the choose life strategy, which was published back in 2002. Although it is disappointing that the targets have not been fully met and, as Willie Coffey told us, our suicide levels are still much higher than other European levels, we must take heart that movement is in the right direction. Therefore, I welcome the new strategy that follows on from choose life and hope that it will have similar impacts on the number of suicides in Scotland.

Many members spoke about issues that are pertinent to the debate, but one of the more important ones is the one about which Kevin Stewart talked at length: the stigma that is connected with mental health issues. That stigma still exists, despite numerous campaigns in the area. How can we encourage people who are desperate and need help to seek and receive that help if we do not remove that stigma? It is really important that we do that. Kenny Gibson also mentioned the work of the NUJ in reporting suicide, which is helpful in that regard.

Many members spoke about groups that are involved in helping people. I also pay tribute to them: the breathing space service, SAMH, the choose life campaign, Touched by Suicide Scotland and, of course, the Samaritans, which is one of the groups that everyone thinks about when we talk about suicide. They provide a lifeline for those who are suicidal, and they work round the clock to be there to listen to people. Many of those groups also work outside the statutory services, which makes them much more approachable when we consider stigma and the fear that it puts into people about approaching mental health services.

Neil Findlay mentioned the Samaritans report "Men and Suicide". Perhaps we have missed the point that gender stereotypes put men at greater risk of suicide; they put greater pressure on men to cope, to be strong and to provide leadership. As James Dornan said, there is an onus on men to have "achieved", by a certain time in their lives. They perhaps compare themselves with their peers and find themselves wanting.

Men also have difficulty discussing their emotions. Women are much better at discussing emotions and reaching out for help. In men, the gender stereotype says that that is weakness, which builds barriers for people to seeking help from their peers and loved ones.

We heard from Neil Findlay and other speakers about the incidence of suicide being much higher in areas of deprivation. That should not be surprising, because living in areas of deprivation where there is no hope of improvement will eventually grind people down to a point at which they see no point in going on.

Jim Hume made a really good point when he talked about suicide and "Equally Well". We need to consider the issue as part of health inequalities. Health inequalities takes in many health issues, and suicide is one of them, which is relevant when we are considering financial pressures and the like.

We also need to look at other groups of people. I think that it was Nanette Milne who talked about the predominance of males in agriculture. Farmers and farm workers are a group of people who perhaps do not have a lot of social interaction, because they work in rural areas where they do not meet people. It is important that we reach out to them.

Graeme Pearson talked about signposting help for men at male-dominated events, such as sporting events. That is really important, but it is also important that we encourage people to speak about the issues.

Another important group is young people. We all know about the issues of transition in mental health services when people move from children's services to adult services. That is a difficult time and we need to ensure that the services are in place to help them through that. There are added pressures on young people; young people have always been under pressure, but as things move on, especially with regard to social media and the like, the pressures change. Yesterday, YoungMinds published research about the pressures that young people feel they are facing. Half of them said that they felt that they had been bullied, which is a frightening amount. Part of that bullying is, of course, being done through new social media. Christine Grahame talked about the difficulty that that causes and suggested that there is a need for education in that area. I say that we need to take that a step further and hold to account the platforms that publish the material. If we were to do that, there would be a greater chance that those platforms would police their pages to ensure that people do not come under pressure from the bullies. That is something that we might need to look at in the future.

Other members talked about substance abuse being a trigger for suicide. That should not surprise us at all. Obviously, those who self-medicate by turning to alcohol and drugs for help are already suffering poor mental health. It therefore follows that they are at risk, so we need to think about ways of helping them through that, and of targeting that group.

Graeme Pearson talked about the impact of suicide on families, and the guilt that they feel about whether they could have done something or intervened. Families are hugely important in this issue. Recently, I attended a meeting of the cross-party group on carers, at which families of people

with mental health problems talked about how they had been treated by psychiatric services. Patients had been told not to confide in their families and families were not given advice on how to support family members who were coming out of hospital and were suffering mental health issues. They had not been told that people coming out of in-patient services are at a greater risk of suicide, so they were ill prepared to help them. Patient confidentiality must of course be paramount, but it is not helpful if we end up stopping people reaching out to those who are best equipped to help them, and if we are not providing those families with the knowledge and understanding of what they can do to help.

In its briefing for today's debate, SAMH talked about the community support networks that it is putting in place to provide support and information for people who are suicidal. That is a step in the right direction. It also talked about community engagement, and many people have spoken about training for people in work situations in which they might meet people who are thinking about suicide. However, I think that we should look at suicide prevention from a community point of view, so that we can address the training needs throughout our whole society, because we do not know when people might meet someone who is thinking about suicide.

On the subject of social media platforms, I read a story about someone who had tried to commit suicide and was trying to find the person who had intervened. That person was not a policeman or a health worker; it was just someone who had been walking past and who had stopped to speak to the person and persuade them not to take their own life, and had then gone on about their business. Obviously, at such a time of great distress, the person did not think of taking the other person's contact details, but they now want to track that person down to thank them for changing their life by convincing them not to commit suicide.

I also welcome the fact that a self-harm strategy will be published. That is important because many of those who commit suicide have also self-harmed. A strategy will help to identify those who might commit suicide.

I will touch briefly on the interventions that are available when someone is attempting to commit suicide or is suffering a mental breakdown. The emergency service that tends to respond is the police, which is perhaps not the best service for someone who is in a difficult place. We need to put in place services that reduce the stigma, and which deal with people quickly—it is an area in which there should be no waiting lists—and with compassion.

One suicide is one too many. It is hard to imagine the despair that outweighs a person's

natural instinct to prolong their life and leads them to take their life and ignore the impact that it will have on their family and on the person who finds them. Although we wish that suicide was not a problem and that we were not debating it, we must do everything possible to support and reach out to those who are at risk.

16:26

Michael Matheson: I very much welcome the tone of the debate and appreciate the fact that all members support the motion. Over the years we have been able to share a common purpose in many social policy areas—not just suicide prevention, but the wider mental health agenda and key points in our drugs policy agenda. I am pleased that we have been able to continue to do that today.

I was struck by what Graeme Pearson said about the sadness of having a debate about suicide prevention, because any loss of life through suicide is a tragedy. However, as I said in my opening remarks, a key part of tackling issues around suicide is to talk about suicide, raise awareness of the issues and engage in a debate about how we can help to prevent suicide. I am sure that Graeme Pearson agrees that there is no better way to set an example than by having a debate of the tone and nature of the one that we have had in our national Parliament today. As Christine Grahame said, over the past 15 years Parliament has had a strong record of debating mental health policy and suicide prevention issues.

I have the pleasure of meeting delegations from other parts of the world who come to Scotland to look at policies that we are taking forward in the health portfolio. Last week, the Danish health minister came over to look at our patient safety programme and to consider what the Danes can learn from that. We have had delegations here to look at our mental health policy. Internationally Scotland is—believe it or not—viewed as being a progressive country in respect of its overall mental health policy and the approach that it has taken over the past 14 or 15 years. That is also the case with suicide prevention. It is recognised that the trend in Scotland over the past decade or so for a reduction in the number of suicides, against a rising number globally, means that Scotland is doing some of the right things. I think that that has happened because the Scottish Parliament has allowed devolution to put much greater focus on such issues than was previously the case. That is to the credit of the Parliament, previous Administrations and the present Administration.

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I totally agree with the minister's point about Scotland leading the way in strategies and so on.

However, in a 10-year period, we have also seen an increase in prescriptions of antidepressants, particularly the new generation of selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors. Some people have been critical of that, but perhaps there is a link between the fall in the number of suicides and the fact that people have access to those antidepressants. Those who criticise the prescribing of them might do well to think about that.

Michael Matheson: In any mental health debate, the prescribing of antidepressants is inevitably raised. It is worth keeping it in mind that medication for mental illness is as valid as medication for coronary heart disease or for arthritis. It is a legitimate form of treatment, when it is appropriately used.

It is fair to say that recently there have been changes to prescribing practices for antidepressants, which has to some extent been because of concerns about how they were being provided to individuals. Sometimes they were prescribed for very short periods and sometimes for extended periods, when clinical evidence has not been so good, in terms of their use. Some of the most recent prescribing data show that clinicians are likely to have individuals on antidepressants for longer and at higher doses because clinical evidence now demonstrates that that is a much more effective way to get the benefit of that medication. When the statistics come out, it looks as if more people are receiving antidepressants for longer, but that reflects the change in prescribing practice. When we talk about such things we need to be very careful that we do not give the impression that use of medicines in treatment of mental illness is in some way secondary.

I want to address access to psychological therapies. Jim Hume raised the point that we should not limit our ambitions to a target of 18 weeks. It is fair to say that Scotland is the only part of the UK that has set such a target in order to drive improvement in access to psychological therapies. It is worth noting that in Scotland the average time for access to such therapies is not 18 weeks, but nine weeks. If a patient requires an urgent referral to a clinical psychologist or another type of therapy, the normal process is the same as the one that is used to refer someone to an orthopaedic surgeon. A person can have an urgent referral, so that they are seen quickly.

There has been an increase in the number of psychologists in the NHS in Scotland and there is a range of equally important therapies that patients can benefit from. There has been mention of physical activity, which can help a person's mental health and wellbeing. We have the social prescribing aspect of the mental health strategy,

which is the green pad: the idea of prescribing physical activity or something else that can help mental wellbeing, rather than medication. The mental health strategy is looking to encourage that and take it forward.

In his contribution, Neil Findlay outlined the scale of the international issue and the increasing problem of suicide around the globe. Between 800,000 and 1 million suicides a year take place around the world, which is why the World Health Organization has set a target to reduce suicides by 10 per cent by 2020. We want to ensure that our strategy helps us to play our part in reducing suicides overall. It is worth noting that in 2012, Scotland's suicide rate fell below the world global monthly suicide rate, to 14 per 100,000, against the global rate of 16 per 100,000. We are moving in the right direction, but we have to do more.

Neil Findlay also raised issues around data in the strategy and data that he got from local authorities. The data all come from the General Register Office of Scotland and can be broken down into health board and local authority areas. There are some differences because in 2010 the WHO issued guidance that resulted in a change to the coding of particular deaths, which meant that some drug deaths are now classed as suicides. However, the GRO still produces two sets of data: one with the new coding and one with the old coding, which shows the 18 per cent reduction. That is why there is a difference in the data that Neil Findlay referred to, which are being measured against data that were collected over the 10 years of the choose life programme, which started before the GRO introduced its change after the WHO made its recommendations.

A number of members have also made reference to the impact that suicide has on families. I am struck, but not surprised, by the number of members who have been touched in some way by the suicide of a family member or a friend. In my opening speech, I made the extremely important point that suicide is preventable. The data show us that the vast majority of individuals who commit suicide were, prior to doing so, receiving treatment in the form of medication for a mental illness, or had been in contact with GPs, A and E departments or other services.

Christine Grahame: Will the minister take an intervention?

Michael Matheson: Let me just finish my point.

If those individuals are in contact with those services, why are we not picking up on their potential risk of committing suicide? It is absolutely key that we learn from that. Part of the pilot work up in Tayside is to look at how we can respond much more effectively to and follow up on

individuals who present in distress at A and E departments but do not need to be admitted, or who are arrested by the police and are in distress, or when other agencies are involved. Therefore, an important piece of work for us to develop in the self-harm strategy is how we can be much more effective at picking up signs of distress, which is a key factor that often presents when someone is at risk of committing suicide.

Presiding Officer, do I have time to take Christine Grahame's intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you about two minutes more.

Christine Grahame: Some members said that some suicides are not detectable and come out the blue. On suicides being preventable, will the minister—before he runs out of time—address the need to educate children and young people about their social media responsibilities? Perhaps we could have avoided some young people committing suicide had there been discipline in use of social media.

Michael Matheson: I understand Christine Grahame's point that there are not always signs of distress prior to someone committing suicide. However, the evidence shows us that a very large number do show such signs, so we must ensure that we get much better at identifying and following up such individuals more effectively.

On cyberbullying, Kevin Stewart raised the benefits of social media in addressing stigma and educating and informing individuals about the services and the supports that are available. He also mentioned how people can use social media negatively—I am sure that we have all witnessed examples of that. There are programmes in schools—for example, the respect programme, which is about respecting individuals when using social media. It is important that we develop that work. I have no doubt that my colleagues in education will continue to progress such policies. I will certainly ensure that, in progressing the self-harm strategy, we consider how to build more of that into our approach and that we consider how cyberbullying, for example, impacts on someone's mental wellbeing.

A number of members asked how we will progress the work. I am not a fan of big thick strategies. I like strategies that are task focused, time limited and measurable—hence the short nature of the suicide strategy. We are establishing an implementation group, which will be made up of a range of individuals from across the sector, who will be responsible for measuring and monitoring implementation of the 11 commitments in the strategy. I have limited the strategy to three years, so that it is focused and so that we can measure and evaluate its progress over that period. I

reassure members that there will be no lack of energy on my part to drive forward the strategy. I have no doubt that the monitoring and implementation group will hold us to account in making sure that we are doing that effectively across all the agencies and with others who have parts to play.

I am very grateful for all the positive comments that have been made in the debate. I will keep Parliament informed of progress on the strategy.

City of Edinburgh Council (Leith Links and Surplus Fire Fund) Bill: Preliminary Stage

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-08734, in the name of John Lamont, on the City of Edinburgh Council (Leith Links and Surplus Fire Fund) Bill. I call John Lamont to speak to and move the motion on behalf of the City of Edinburgh Council (Leith Links and Surplus Fire Fund) Bill Committee.

16:39

John Lamont (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I am pleased to open the preliminary stage debate on the City of Edinburgh Council (Leith Links and Surplus Fire Fund) Bill, and to provide the Parliament with some background information on how the committee has considered the bill so far.

The bill is the fourth private bill to come before the Parliament this session and is one of the less controversial. No objection to it has been received.

The first thing that struck me about the bill when the committee was given the task of scrutinising it was its rather unwieldy title. It was not long before I appreciated that, although there is one bill, it deals with two different and unconnected purposes. Therefore, although it is fair to say that the bill is not controversial, it has still given the committee plenty of substance to consider. We also had to make ourselves familiar with the rather unique procedures that concern an important area of the Parliament's work.

Before I provide some background information on what led to the bill and talk about its broad principles, I will speak briefly about private bills more generally and why they are necessary.

Private bills propose laws that allow individuals, groups of individuals or corporate entities to acquire powers or benefits in excess of or in conflict with the general law. Private bills for large-scale works are somewhat rarer these days, but the Parliament still sees a steady stream of governance reorganisation bills and the occasional bill that seeks to make changes to private legislation to enable construction to take place. Unusually, the bill that we are debating deals with both issues. The common denominator is the promoter: the City of Edinburgh Council.

The bill's first objective is to amend section 22 of the schedule to the City of Edinburgh District Council Order Confirmation Act 1991 so that the erection of a statue of John Rattray on Leith Links is no longer prohibited. Currently, section 22

prohibits the erection of buildings, including monuments and statues, on Leith Links.

Members might ask: who is John Rattray, and why should he be commemorated in that way? John Rattray was an accomplished golfer on Leith Links in the 18th century, and was instrumental in setting down the rules for the game of golf. For that reason, the Leith Rules Golf Society wishes to erect a life-size statue of him on Leith Links. In giving evidence, the chair of the statue committee, Pat Denzler, said:

"The aim was to have something iconic to represent Leith."—[*Official Report, City of Edinburgh Council (Leith Links and Surplus Fire Fund) Bill Committee*, 14 November 2013; c 13.]

The sculptor David Annand has been commissioned to create that statue. I am sure that members will be acquainted with his work, particularly as one of his bronze statues—that of Robert Ferguson the poet striding out at the entrance to Canongate church—resides not too far from the chamber.

The committee was concerned with ensuring that the power that was sought was indeed necessary and that no unintended consequences would arise from its use. We were clear that the issues of aesthetics and the security of the statue had already been the subject of the planning process. Planning permission was granted on 18 April 2013

"on the basis that the proposals comply with the Council's development plan and the relevant non-statutory guidelines, and would preserve the character and appearance of the conservation area and have no effect on residential amenity."

Our site visit to Leith Links on 5 November 2013 further served to reassure us.

The committee is satisfied that the bill is tightly drawn to create an exception only for that particular statue and that no further development can take place on the site at Leith Links. Fundraising to erect the statue is continuing, and the Leith Rules Golf Society hopes that the Ryder cup will help to focus those efforts. The committee also heard that a proportion of the funds that are raised will be given to the promoter to pay for the statue's on-going maintenance.

The bill's second objective concerns the revitalisation of a fund that was set up to assist those who were caught up in a series of fires in Edinburgh's High Street in 1824. The Surplus Fire Fund is constituted under the Edinburgh Corporation Order Confirmation Act 1927, later amended by the Edinburgh Corporation Order Confirmation Act 1967 and the City of Edinburgh District Council Order Confirmation Act 1991. Esmond Hamilton, from the City of Edinburgh Council, explained that £11,000 was originally

collected to assist those who were caught up in the fires, and that that had grown into the sum of £1.25 million, which generates approximately £30,000 per annum.

The Surplus Fire Fund lay dormant until 2001, when the Fire Brigades Union contacted the City of Edinburgh Council, which led to the fund's reactivation. The council's pensions and trusts committee discussed the future management of the fund during 2011 and 2012, considering how its assets might be put to better use while having regard to the spirit of the fund's current purposes, changes in society, the effectiveness of its present constitution and engagement with key stakeholders. On 31 January 2013, the full council agreed to promote the bill, which includes three changes to the fund. The bill proposes to transfer the assets, rights and liabilities of the Surplus Fire Fund to the Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations Trust; to amend the purposes for which the fund can be used; and to dissolve the fund as currently constituted.

The committee heard from Ella Simpson, the director of the Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations Council, about EVOC's experience of running various grant programmes and several restricted funds and about its large network of organisations, which could refer possible beneficiaries of the fund.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that you must draw to a close, please.

John Lamont: On the basis of the evidence that we have received, the committee is supportive of the bill's objectives and believes that a private bill is the necessary and appropriate way to proceed.

I am grateful to my fellow committee members for their hard work and to the clerks for their work in connection with the bill.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the City of Edinburgh Council (Leith Links and Surplus Fire Fund) Bill and that the bill should proceed as a private bill.

16:46

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): I am pleased to support the bill in its totality, although, as the local member for Leith Links, I have a particular interest in the first part of the bill. I believe that the bill has local support, as is evidenced by the local community councils and other groups and individuals that support it. The only concern that I have occasionally heard has been about the bill maybe taking up public funds. However, it clearly involves not public funds but fundraising by the Leith Rules Golf Society.

There is a great sense of history in Leith. We have a rich and varied history, and there is an on-going campaign for a Leith museum, which I shall speak about in Parliament on another occasion. Part of that history is the significance of Leith Links, which is one of the first places where golf was played. I do not want to enter into an argument about where golf was played for the very first time, but it is indisputable that the rules of golf were first written down by those who played golf on Leith Links. Indeed, in the 1740s, the City of Edinburgh Council, the promoter of the bill, offered a silver club to the winner of a golf competition on Leith Links on the condition that the rules be written down. I am pleased that the rules were written down on 7 March 1744, which is my birthday—well, 7 March is.

It is appropriate that a statue of John Rattray will be put up, as he won that trophy on three occasions. He was a very colourful character, being a surgeon, an archer and a Jacobite as well as a distinguished golfer. It is fitting that his statue will be put up on Leith Links as quickly as possible. It is also timely, given that there will be heightened interest in golf in Scotland this year because of the Ryder cup. I hope that that will provide a boost to the fundraising for the statue.

For the reasons that John Lamont has explained, it is clear that a bill is required to change the law. I know that explaining that to people has provided a great deal of amusement and attracted interest, but that is in the nature of some private bills. It was not quite so clear that a bill was required to change the Surplus Fire Fund. In fact, I was rather alarmed to read that the drafting of section 42 of the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 was ambiguous and that its interpretation was difficult. Apparently, the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator thought that legislation was not required, but the City of Edinburgh Council decided that it would play safe and ensure that nobody could challenge the way in which it wanted to broaden the scope of the purposes of the Surplus Fire Fund in order to attract more applications for grants and awards.

I support that objective. The reason why I was disturbed by the comment about section 42 of the 2005 act is that the people who were responsible for that act are Johann Lamont and myself. I was amazed to think that we should be in any way connected with defective legislation.

That apart, I commend the committee for its very detailed and conscientious examination of the bill. I read its report and the *Official Report* of the evidence session, and I thought that the committee interrogated every nook and cranny of the bill. I am pleased that the next member to speak, Anne McTaggart, was one of those distinguished interrogators.

16:50

Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab): As a member of the City of Edinburgh Council (Leith Links and Surplus Fire Fund) Bill Committee, I am pleased to contribute briefly to the debate, which deals with an issue that I am sure is of importance to the local community.

In my role as a member of the committee, I have gained a valuable insight into an important and historical local issue that necessitates full consultation prior to any recommendation being made. I feel that the debate has illustrated the vital role that Leith Links has played in the life of the local community, and I believe that everyone who has an interest in the area should be consulted before any decision is made. That is why I have very much enjoyed being a member of the committee and, in particular, the opportunity that it has given me to visit what, for local residents, is an important site.

I am happy to support the installation of the John Rattray statue, especially as the local community has been involved in a consultation process on issues such as the potential effects on the local area of tourism as a result of people visiting the site of the statue, once it has been installed. I am particularly pleased to note that the proposed artwork highlights the valuable role that public consultation has played in this Leith-based initiative. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please. The fact that chatting was going on meant that the member thought that someone was trying to intervene.

Anne McTaggart: The consultation process afforded the opportunity to seek guidance from Police Scotland, which, following its viewing of the initial plans, indicated that the site was vulnerable and that

“consideration should be given to installing public space monitoring CCTV or other measures”

to ensure that it would be safe and secure. The committee was informed that such concerns had been taken into account and that the plans had been changed to lessen such risks, but it is important that consideration should be given to ensuring that any statue that is installed on the site meets all the necessary requirements for safe installation, including on-going health and safety requirements.

I am pleased to support the initiative for which the bill provides, which will provide an additional structure that will enhance the landscape of the local area, and I thank the committee’s convener, John Lamont, for his outstanding patience and guidance, and the committee clerk, Claire Menzies Smith, for her patience and guidance.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I invite Sandra White to wind up the debate on behalf of the committee. You have six minutes.

16:53

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I thank the convener, John Lamont, and congratulate him on his highly informative contribution. I am sure that most members in the chamber found it extremely interesting. I also thank Malcolm Chisholm, who—as he mentioned—is the local member, for his welcome local knowledge. I found what he had to say very interesting, as I am sure that other members did. In addition, I thank my fellow committee member, Anne McTaggart, for her comments and her work on the committee.

When the committee and the clerks went to visit the Leith Links area, it was evident that a great deal of attention had been paid to exactly where the statue would be erected and to ensuring that it would not be in front of anyone’s windows and would not disturb anyone. As Malcolm Chisholm mentioned, the local community councils have been highly supportive of the bill’s provisions overall.

As the deputy convener, I am very pleased to close the debate for the committee. As well as thanking the committee members for their scrutiny of the bill, I thank all those who also contributed to the scrutiny by providing oral evidence, such as those who proposed the bill and the statue. I also thank everyone who wrote in with their thoughts, from the police to people in the community. I thank the committee clerks for their assistance, which was most welcome to me because I have never been a member of a private bill committee before. I found it very interesting to learn about the difference between private and public bills, which the convener has explained, and why private bills have to come through Parliament in this way.

It is very much an honour to be deputy convener of the committee. As I said, this is my first time as a member of a private bill committee, and I may be called forward again for such a role. I am always happy to do my duty, as are most MSPs.

As I said, I visited Leith Links with the committee. I believe that the statue will be an attractive addition to Leith Links and that it will promote awareness of the rich history of golfing on the links, which Malcolm Chisholm mentioned, and relevant historic connections. The Leith community will benefit because the statue will attract visitors, who, as Anne McTaggart said, will make use of facilities and businesses in the area, which can only be a good thing.

The bill will also revitalise the Surplus Fire Fund, which had become dormant. The changes to the purposes for which the fund can be applied will

improve its use by encouraging more applications from individuals who have been affected by fire. *[Interruption.]*

Is it okay to continue, Presiding Officer?

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Please do. If you could continue to five o'clock, I would be most grateful.

Sandra White: Thank you very much. I just wondered whether it was all right to continue. I am not one for complaining, but I could not hear myself speak.

It is really important that people realise that the bill will open up the Surplus Fire Fund to so many more people—which is why I want to encourage members to listen to these points.

As I said, the changes will encourage more applications from individuals who have been affected by fire, because their injuries will no longer have to be deemed to be serious. They will also allow people to claim for damage to domestic premises and household contents; in many cases—this is really important—those applying will not be insured, so that is a very helpful change. They will expressly allow the provision of grants to burns units that care for people who are resident in the City of Edinburgh Council area. Those three points are very important.

The transfer of the fund will enable EVOC to refer organisations that it works with in its large network. EVOC believes that that will have a

“cumulative impact on other charitable organisations and ... individuals.”—*[Official Report, City of Edinburgh Council (Leith Links and Surplus Fire Fund) Bill Committee, 14 November 2013; c 32.]*

That is also an important point. The transfer will also make use of the trustees' wide experience to ensure that the fund is used to best effect.

I believe that both the bill's purposes will provide benefits to the community. On behalf of the committee, I recommend to Parliament that the general principles of the bill be agreed to.

Malcolm Chisholm: Will the member give way?

Sandra White: Presiding Officer?

The Presiding Officer: Certainly.

Malcolm Chisholm: I know that the member is a visitor to Leith Links because I remember bumping into her at the funfair at the Leith festival last year. The statue will obviously be a very welcome development for people who live in Leith, but does the member think that people from Glasgow, like her, or from further afield will now visit Leith Links to see the statue as well as attend the funfair?

Sandra White: That was a very welcome intervention. I met Mr Chisholm at the funfair on

Leith Links, when I was with my granddaughter and Mr Chisholm was with his. Certainly, lots of things take place on the links. As someone who comes from Glasgow to visit Edinburgh, I will certainly make my way down to Leith Links because I know exactly where the statue will be. One of the great things about the statue is that it will be quite iconic but not out of place on the links. It will certainly encourage people to go down there.

I hope that people who are encouraged to do that—perhaps people like me, or even younger people—might take up golf. Who knows? People will read about the statue and will be able to see the historic connections in the links area. I think that the statue is a great idea and I look forward to bumping into Mr Chisholm and his granddaughter again on Leith Links and perhaps having a chat and a game of golf as well.

Thank you, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: Our thanks are due to you, Ms White.

Business Motion

16:59

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-08812, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revision to the business programme for tomorrow, Wednesday 22 January 2014.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for Wednesday 22 January 2014—

after

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Budget (Scotland) (No.3) Bill

insert

followed by Legislative Consent Motion: Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill – UK Legislation

delete

5.00 pm Decision Time

and insert

5.45 pm Decision Time—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is decision time.

The first question is, that motion S4M-08577, in the name of Joan McAlpine, on the Burrell Collection (Lending and Borrowing) (Scotland) Bill, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Burrell Collection (Lending and Borrowing) (Scotland) Bill be passed.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-08800, in the name of Michael Matheson, on suicide prevention, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises the pain experienced by families and friends who have lost loved ones through the tragedy of suicide; notes the significant progress that has been made in recent years in suicide prevention, with an overall decrease of 18% in the suicide rate in the last decade, and in supporting people who have been bereaved through suicide; agrees that there is still work to be done to reduce suicides further, and therefore welcomes the publication of the new *Suicide Prevention Strategy 2013-2016*, which builds on previous and continuing work and establishes the priorities and actions for suicide prevention over the next three years in support of a healthier and fairer Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-08734, in the name of John Lamont, on the City of Edinburgh Council (Leith Links and Surplus Fire Fund) Bill, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the City of Edinburgh Council (Leith Links and Surplus Fire Fund) Bill and that the bill should proceed as a private bill.

Lift Lives for Good

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-08736, in the name of John Finnie, on the lift lives for good campaign. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes Oxfam's latest fundraising campaign, Lift Lives for Good, which will run until 30 March 2014; understands that the campaign will highlight Oxfam's work in impoverished communities across the world and show how lifting one life up creates a chain reaction that flows to others in the community; further understands that the UK Government will match all money raised from Oxfam shops during this period; believes that this campaign will allow the public to better understand the results that Oxfam achieves with their donations, and wishes Oxfam the very best of success with the campaign in the Highlands and Islands and across the country and with its aim to raise £10 million.

17:02

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests as a member of Oxfam.

I thank members from across the Parliament for supporting the motion, and I thank Oxfam for its briefing. In that briefing, we read that Oxfam's vision is

"a just world without poverty".

I do not think that anyone would take issue with that. It wants

"A world where people feel empowered to improve their own lives, so they can in turn help others in their communities, setting in motion a chain reaction of change."

We know that Oxfam enjoys considerable support across the country through its network of shops and its volunteers. A recurring theme of the approach that it takes is to encourage self-help. As it says,

"It's about more than just delivering aid."

It is about creating that chain reaction. It would like to see, as I hope we all would,

"grassroots action"

resulting in

"global decision making"

that effects

"lasting change."

Oxfam has a history of involvement in campaigning. It has been involved with the make poverty history and enough food for everyone if campaigns. The lift lives for good fundraising

campaign is the start of an ambitious new drive to tackle the root causes of poverty in 2014.

Oxfam makes clear in its excellent briefing and the report that it has compiled, "Lift Lives for Good: Actions to Tackle Inequality and Climate Change" that it sees the two biggest threats as being the growing gap between the richest and the poorest and the damage that is caused to poor people by climate change. Although there have been some economic gains in middle-income countries, they have not resulted in lifting many people out of poverty.

In the report, Oxfam mentions the political leadership in the United Kingdom. I hope that members of the Scottish Parliament and the other devolved institutions will see that there is a clear supporting role for them, too.

With regard to equality, Oxfam mentions the need to

"Put tackling inequality at the heart of decision making",

"Address the unfair UK and global tax rules that fuel inequality"

and

"Promote universal free public health care and education services to tackle inequality".

There are other points, but I will move on to climate change, given the limited time that I have.

Oxfam encourages investment in a low-carbon future, which I hope that we would all support. It refers to the UK, but that is for Scotland, the UK and the planet. Oxfam asks us to invest in climate resilience and low-carbon development overseas and to

"Promote ambitious global agreements on climate change"

and

"sustainable energy access".

Positive moves on that have happened in the Parliament, but we should not be complacent.

The world produces enough food for everyone, yet one in eight people—840 million people—go to bed hungry each night. It is estimated that climate change could increase child malnutrition by 20 per cent, which would eliminate improvements that might otherwise occur through campaigns such as this one. A damning statistic is that, for every \$6 of subsidy for fossil fuels, renewable energy enjoys only \$1 of subsidy.

Oxfam is talking about, for example, an innovative dairy programme in Sri Lanka, a revolutionary rice-growing system in Liberia, and seed-growing co-operatives in Nepal. All those measures are designed to be catalysts to lift entire communities. Oxfam talks about smart aid and says that a concerted effort is needed to achieve

the ripple effect of such good work. The important thing is to empower communities.

Oxfam talks about reappraising how aid works and seeing it as having transformative power rather than as a single short-term action. Aid helps people to build skills and help themselves. That approach is at the heart of what Oxfam does and has done for many years. We have all been involved in gifting a goat, a hen or bags of seeds and the like. Oxfam believes—it is rather harsh on itself—that it has not communicated that model of growth particularly well.

Oxfam notes that, in the past 10 years, 50 million more children in Africa have benefited from education, which is at the root of all our potential for improvement. It refers to how the global fund to tackle HIV, which blights the continent of Africa, is saving 3,000 lives a day and how debt cancellation has released millions of pounds for positive work in the countries affected—although many of us feel that countries could go a lot further on debt cancellation.

Oxfam does not just work abroad. There are fine examples from its work across Scotland. Govan features a lot in that—it is where Tea in the Pot; the GalGael Trust, which builds the wonderful traditional sailing boats that we have seen; and Sunny Govan radio are based. In my part of the world, Lochboisdale Amenity Trust is undertaking an interesting project to fund the purchase of trees for crofters to create shelter belts on fenced crofts and common grazings and for amenity planting. Oxfam is involved with partner agencies in making grants.

The mother appeal will give mothers worldwide the lift that they need to use their power to change the future. I think that we all agree that mothers are a powerful motivating group not only in their families but in their communities. The hope is to raise £10 million, and the UK Government has said that it will match up to £5 million donations that are made before 31 March and sales of items that are donated before then and sold before the end of April. I do not often praise the UK Government, but it is to be complimented on that and on retaining the overseas aid budget.

A new vocabulary, certainly for me, is associated with the campaign. There is shwopping—I hope that I have pronounced that correctly—which means bringing an old item of clothing into a Marks and Spencer store each time that something new is bought. All such clothing goes to Oxfam. I am told that items are placed in a shwop drop box. I am sure that adequate instructions will be available for anyone who wishes to help.

The appeal is targeting projects in Bangladesh, Tajikistan and Zambia. We all understand that

there is a range of problems there and that it is important that we provide assistance.

Oxfam has a wide community and it is well known across Scotland. It provides statistics on and a breakdown of income from its shops. I am delighted that the shop in Oban town, where I used to live, features in the top 10 of shops. Oxfam has a breakdown of its record shops, clothes shops, bookshops and the like.

Oxfam quotes an interesting survey from last year, in which people said that supporting a charity uplifts their spirits. I hope that we will all take the opportunity to have our spirits uplifted in coming years and that we will all support this good campaign.

17:09

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): I have pleasure in supporting the motion and I congratulate John Finnie on promoting lift lives for good.

People feel empowered to improve their own lives and, if they can do so, the idea of making it a continuous cycle is part of the belief that our communities are at the heart of the way we live. People in the developing world have that potential and they need to get a first step, even a little lift, to allow them to make that change, so that they can empower their families and develop good ideas in their communities.

I was struck by the questions from some school students from Tain royal academy, who came yesterday to speak to me as someone proposing the yes idea, as well as to the no idea candidate, asking us how we could deal with inequality. That is the thing that struck them most. We say that, in Britain as a whole, inequality makes society less functional than it could be—indeed, some might say it is dysfunctional—but let us imagine what the situation must be in societies that have no ability to invest at all. That strikes home to me as a worldwide phenomenon that we must address and that Oxfam has addressed with its new campaign.

We have seen in the past the ways in which the rich have tried to help the poor, not with disaster relief but with misplaced notions about agriculture that does not fit, by imposing technologies such as genetically modified crops, which enrich only the multinationals. More recently, we have seen in Africa the use of mobile phones and Kindles, which have allowed for communication and education. We have also seen the fundamentals of co-operatives that allow people to organise worker-owner lives, which must be one of the best ways in which people can get a lift. We have excellent examples from our own country, and there are growing examples in many of the countries mentioned by John Finnie.

I suggest that the chain reaction that we are seeking is down to changing the way in which people look at overseas aid, as it used to be called. I thank Oxfam for showing us that it is not about handouts, as some people perceive it. The briefing makes it perfectly clear that good aid works, so that we can understand the long-term value of the work that is done by lifting lives for good.

I am sure that other members will have more to add to the debate, so I shall end by saying that there is no excuse for people in the north of Scotland not to come to Marks and Spencer in Inverness, which is our nearest shop, to do some shopping, and also to visit the Oxfam shop in Inverness, as it is the only one near my constituency. If it makes people feel good about going into the Oxfam shop and giving a little, the lifting lives for good campaign will benefit from their cash. Oxfam needs it, we need it and the world will be a more equal place—a little—if we do that.

17:13

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Like Rob Gibson, I start by congratulating John Finnie on securing the debate and on stealing everything that I was going to say. However, it bears repeating, so I shall do so.

I also commend Oxfam for its lift lives for good campaign because, as John Finnie rightly said, its vision, which I believe is one that we all share, is of a just world without poverty. People who are empowered to do something about their own circumstances and who can, in turn, help lift others in their own communities out of poverty are an extremely powerful tool. Oxfam describes it as a chain reaction; others might suggest that it is a virtuous circle. One thing is clear, though: it has the potential to change lives and to lift people out of poverty for good.

I will share with members one local example. I used to work with a community in which we empowered people by providing them with vocational and non-vocational training. We lifted a huge number of women who had no qualifications out of poverty by equipping them for the jobs market, and many of them went on to secure jobs. The one who I think of in particular had three children and no qualifications to her name, but she is now a teacher, and her three children have a very different role model. It is not just about the power of what she did to her family; the chain reaction that came from that impacted on the whole community, and she is now giving a lot back to that community. Empowering people does work; it changes lives.

The point of the campaign is to raise funds so that Oxfam can continue with its good work on tackling the root causes of poverty. Its approach is based on smart aid, which is about helping people to help themselves. If we all do just one thing, or make just one intervention, and then we all disappear, the effect will not be as long-lasting or sustainable as it would be if we did something that the community could carry forward.

Oxfam gives us a number of different examples. My favourite one is of the dairy co-ops in Sri Lanka. A family receives a cow, which is a very useful thing, and training in its care, so the family is given an asset and the skills in using that asset to benefit themselves and their community. I am not quite sure whether that exact example would work in Scotland, but I am sure that it is absolutely appropriate in Sri Lanka.

We all know that there are lots of demands on Oxfam's funds. It is right that John Finnie should have highlighted some of its achievements. In the past 10 years, 50 million more children in Africa have gone to school. Oxfam has responded to twice as many disasters as it did a decade ago. Through all that, it has ensured that 4.3 million people have improved access to clean water, 120,000 people have been helped with emergency services, and overall, in 2012-13 alone, Oxfam reached 13.5 million people across 54 countries. That is a huge achievement, but we all know that that work needs to continue and that the demands continue to grow.

Like John Finnie, I do not often praise the UK Government. In fact, it would normally be a cold day in hell before I would praise the UK Government. However, on this occasion, I unreservedly welcome its commitment to match fund Oxfam's efforts in raising funds. If we actually manage to raise £6 million through Oxfam, I wonder whether we could encourage the UK Government to match that and not put a cap of £5 million on its contribution.

We know that Scotland has a very positive history of giving generously, including through Oxfam's network of 51 shops, 12 bookshops—I use one regularly—and two specialist music shops. We have a positive culture of giving. All I can do is add to the words of John Finnie and Rob Gibson, when they suggested that, if we do nothing else, we should pop into Marks and Spencer, or one of the Oxfam shops, and give generously, because it has the power to transform lives.

17:18

Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): I, too, thank John Finnie for securing the debate. Oxfam's record in fighting poverty is quite

exceptional. As an organisation it has, more than any other, highlighted the work that has yet to be done.

We should celebrate Oxfam's work in showing that deprivation is not just about money. It is also about mental and physical health, feeling safe and secure, and connectedness to family and community. Oxfam's work on the humankind index, which released its second annual results for Scotland in June last year, gives us a vital way of understanding this complexity. Gross domestic product growth is no good if all the growth goes to the rich, or if wealth is being created only by breaking the backs and spirits of working people.

This week, Oxfam revealed that the 85 richest people in the world own as much as the poorest half of the human race, which is 3.5 billion people put together. The Scottish Government's stated priority is sustainable economic growth; I hope that, one day, we will see that being extended to include sustainable human wellbeing.

One idea that was raised in a meeting in Parliament last week is worth serious consideration: a universal basic income, or citizen's income. The amount would be enough to cover basic needs and it would be paid to every citizen without means testing. It would recognise unpaid work such as raising children and looking after relatives, and it would support lifelong learning, reduce inequality and give us a real chance to abolish poverty altogether—a mission that less radical ideas have repeatedly failed to achieve.

Oxfam's lift lives for good campaign recognises the importance of building skills and community links as well as providing aid. Here in Scotland, two of Oxfam's partners recognise the importance of wellbeing beyond money. Tea in the Pot, in Govan, helps women who have mental health problems to share their experiences and ideas. Not only does that element of the project help people to fight loneliness and improve wellbeing, but the project also means that people who are normally excluded from decision-making and ignored by officials can work together to make their voices heard and challenge the policies and conditions that damage their wellbeing.

Let us celebrate Oxfam often, but let us work harder on our national performance framework and on introducing some of the key elements that people have declared are a priority for them, which are not about getting more money but involve other areas and issues around wellbeing that Oxfam has highlighted.

17:21

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands)
(Con): I, too, congratulate John Finnie on securing

the debate. I am so glad that we are having a debate about Oxfam because it is such a wonderful organisation, and all the people who volunteer to work for it are wonderful as well. I am pleased to join John Finnie and other colleagues in paying tribute to Oxfam's work and specifically in welcoming its lift lives for good campaign, which many of us will have seen highlighted on television in the past few weeks in very effective advertisements.

I commend all my constituents in the Highlands and Islands who donate to Oxfam financially, or through giving second-hand goods, or by volunteering in our Oxfam shops. I do not know whether the Oxfam shop appreciates all the pairs of trousers that I give it, but I certainly donate goods myself. I was delighted to learn, because Oban is my local town, that its excellent Oxfam shop is, as John Finnie mentioned, in the top 10 performing Oxfam shops in Scotland. The shop took in £88,943 in sales in the period from April to September last year. The Oban shop has a particularly good second-hand books section, where many bargains can be picked up.

The Oxfam briefing for the debate emphasises that the lift lives for good campaign aims to show how smart aid works, and to highlight practical examples of Oxfam's project work. Jackie Baillie mentioned the setting up of dairy co-operatives in Sri Lanka through cows being provided to families, as well as training. There are seed-growing co-operatives in Nepal, and former swamps in Liberia are being converted into rice paddies. Susana Edwards, a Liberian farmer in one of the very poorest regions of Liberia, has been helped by Oxfam. She said:

"It's better to have your own farm than to have to buy rice. When they empower you and you begin to work, you get a lot of food; through the food you get money, which means the children can get to school."

It is important for all charities working internationally with people who are in poverty to demonstrate to the public here the tangible impacts of their work on people and communities, so I am pleased that Oxfam, through lift lives for good, is doing that in a very clear and impressive manner. Enabling some of the world's poorest people to grow the food that they need to feed themselves and their families is a very big part of the work that Oxfam is doing, and it will be increasingly important as we go forward—not least as some studies suggest that climate change might increase the number of people who are at risk of hunger by up to 20 per cent by 2050.

I am pleased that John Finnie's motion notes that the UK Government is match funding all money that is raised from Oxfam shops during this campaign period. That is to be warmly welcomed.

The UK Government's commitment to international aid and development has been impressive. In particular, I mention the significant investment in international climate finance, specifically to help developing countries to pursue low-carbon growth and to adapt to the impacts of climate change. There is also our response to the humanitarian crisis that continues to ravage so many people in Syria. The UK has committed more than £600 million to help those who are affected by that conflict—the UK's largest ever response to a humanitarian crisis.

I conclude by again thanking Oxfam for its work. I encourage constituents from across the Highlands and Islands, and everywhere else, to consider supporting the lift lives for good campaign, which I wish every success in the period ahead.

17:25

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): As other members have done, I warmly congratulate John Finnie, not just on his motion and on offering Parliament an opportunity to debate it, but on covering many of the issues that I think members were all looking to cover in our speeches. That underscores John Finnie's personal commitment to the issues that are under discussion.

The point about a chain reaction or a virtuous cycle was well made and should inform our approach to the debate, which is about the longer term and development of self-help, about which Rob Gibson made some interesting comments. I know from my experience of visiting Malawi that the way in which international aid is delivered has different facets. There is an antiretroviral programme, which is—thankfully—beginning to get some traction, but without investment in the fertiliser programme, there is a lack of the foodstuffs that are absolutely essential to making the antiretroviral programme work and to tackling the incidence of HIV/AIDS.

If we look further forward, education issues are absolutely paramount. The investment in building and expanding the schools network and supporting more children, not just through primary school but on to secondary school, was a natural and necessary development. I know of a community group in my constituency that is looking to fund solar power packs to support mobile phones in the north of Malawi. We are seeing a logical extension of international aid in some developing countries.

I understand that the mother appeal and the lift lives for good appeal are umbrellas that cover a range of initiatives. The mother appeal, which is run in conjunction with Marks and Spencer—perhaps making it slightly less accessible for some

of my constituents than for those of other members—aims to raise £10 million by mothers day on 30 March. It encourages people to contribute and to celebrate motherhood at the same time. As John Finnie said, it is focused on projects in Bangladesh, Tajikistan and rural Zambia. In Bangladesh, many poor households are headed by women and depend on livestock. Those women are being encouraged and supported to form dairy producer groups and to work co-operatively. In Tajikistan, the focus is on smallholders. Women fruit and vegetable farmers are being helped to unite to sell collectively, and to become more than the sum of their parts. There is also access to finance and business training, which has long-term benefits.

In Zambia, women in the Copperbelt province are being trained in soya and dairy farming techniques and are being provided with information on crop rotation and water conservation, which will help to build resilience to the climate change impacts to which Rob Gibson and others referred. The aim is to raise £5 million through public donations through M and S or direct to Oxfam, but as others have said, that will be backed by the UK aid match programme, which will take the figure up to £10 million.

The aid match programme was launched in September last year, following a successful pilot covering 17 charities and about £40 million of donations. The aim is to give £120 million to UK charities over the next three years by match funding—up to £5 million—the sums that are raised by a variety of projects. Sensibly, the programme also ring fences allocations for smaller projects in 26 developing countries. The programme will give real impetus to fundraising efforts; people tend to give more if they are encouraged because their donations will be matched by additional funds.

I accept that there are, in times of austerity, those who question the legitimacy of using public money to support people in other countries. The argument is that it should be left to the discretion of individuals and that the funding would be better deployed at home. However, I simply do not accept that even our own interests are best served by looking inward and turning our backs on those who are in desperate need of our help. I am thankful that most people in the UK agree, with more than 60 per cent backing the UK Government's commitment to spending 0.7 per cent of national income on international aid. That may or may not be because, as Save the Children suggested, it is in our DNA.

However, the benefit that that aid—good aid, as Rob Gibson rightly pointed out—is delivering is in no doubt at all. In 2012, UK aid prevented 2.7 million mothers and children from going

hungry. It vaccinated 12 million children against killer diseases and supported more than 5 million children in going to school by building classrooms, training teachers and providing cash grants to poor families. We should all acknowledge that success, which should embolden us to do more.

I welcome the debate and congratulate John Finnie again on allowing it to take place and allowing Jackie Baillie the long-overdue opportunity to raise her voice in praise of the UK coalition Government. I thank the aid organisations that do such invaluable work throughout the developing world. In particular, I wish Oxfam every success with its lift lives for good campaign.

17:31

The Minister for Housing and Welfare (Margaret Burgess): I am pleased to close the debate on behalf of the Scottish Government. Like others, I thank John Finnie for bringing the topic to the chamber for debate and for lodging the motion, which I whole-heartedly support.

During the debate, members outlined clearly how the campaign can help. Sometimes, a small amount sets off the chain reaction about which Oxfam is talking and about which we have heard. In her speech, Jackie Baillie talked about how she had seen in her community something that altered the lives of individuals and their families, lifted them out of poverty and had an impact on the wider community. Such programmes in the underdeveloped or developing countries not only change countries and communities but make the world a better place, which is what we all want.

Humza Yousaf, the Minister for External Affairs and International Development, would have liked to have been here but he is on a visit to Malawi and Zambia, representing Scotland's work in those countries and seeing for himself some of the challenges that communities in the developing world face and the work that is being done to help them. During his visit, he will meet the Oxfam country director in Zambia to hear at first hand about some of the good work that Oxfam, supported by Scottish Government funding, is doing to support communities in dealing with the impacts of climate change.

Oxfam is a key delivery partner for the Scottish Government's international development and climate justice funds. The project in Zambia is just one of a number of Oxfam initiatives that we are supporting and that are making a real difference to people's lives in many parts of the world. In Tanzania, Oxfam is receiving £1.3 million of Scottish Government funding to provide food security for farmers through a partnership arrangement with the local Government and

private companies. In Pakistan, we are giving Oxfam £350,000 to assist small-scale farmers to improve their productivity, while in Malawi we are providing Oxfam with £400,000 to deliver a project that is focused on addressing the needs of vulnerable women who have been affected by HIV and AIDS.

Of course, that is just a flavour of the work that Oxfam does around the world, which is having a huge impact on people's lives, reducing poverty and fighting inequality wherever they exist. That is work to which Scotland contributes globally, not just through the funding provided by the Scottish Government, but through the contribution of Scottish taxpayers to the UK Government's development assistance programmes and, of course, through donations and purchases made by people in Oxfam's 51 shops with 1,000 trained volunteers up and down the country, which members mentioned and on which they commented.

Last year, Oxfam celebrated 50 years of working in Scotland and, in that time, it has done a marvellous job in raising awareness among the general public of the inequalities that, sadly, persist in many parts of our world.

Oxfam played a crucial role in highlighting the problem of global hunger through last year's campaign, enough food for everyone if. That influenced the Scottish Government's decision to give funding to the six development education centres in Scotland that provide training and support for Scottish teachers to equip our young people to become global citizens and be aware of the challenges that our world faces and the role that we can all play in helping to tackle them.

The make poverty history campaign in 2005 is another example of how Oxfam has worked with other organisations to help draw attention in Scotland to the issues that face people in the developing world.

Oxfam has a track record of dedication and commitment as well as a passion to make a difference to people's lives throughout the world. I can see that passion reflected in the lift lives for good campaign that it has launched.

The campaign rightly highlights the two biggest threats to ending poverty: the growing gap between the richest and the poorest people in the world; and the damage that is caused to poor people by climate change. The Scottish Government takes both of those issues seriously. Right now, our £9 million international development fund is focused on helping some of the poorest people in sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia.

The "Scotland's Future" publication sets out clearly what action this Government would take in

an independent Scotland to help the world's poorest people, including commitments to spend 0.7 per cent of our gross national income on overseas aid, ensure that all our policies across Government do no harm to countries in the developing world, promote gender equality, and give careful consideration to the question of unjust debts.

We also fully support the lift lives for good campaign's focus on highlighting the issue of climate change. The Scottish Government strongly recognises the voices of those who are in the front line in relation to the impacts of climate change. They are suffering from a changing environment that is causing increasingly erratic weather patterns, crop failures, water shortages and newly spreading diseases. Our world-leading £3 million climate justice fund is a recognition of the injustice of climate change and the fact that those who have done least to cause the problem have been most affected by its impacts.

The fund is already helping to mitigate the impacts of climate change for people in Malawi and Zambia and, last October, the First Minister announced a doubling of the climate justice fund, which will provide further support for vulnerable communities in sub-Saharan Africa.

The Scottish Government is pleased to support this motion and commends the work of Oxfam in drawing attention to the issues of global poverty and inequality through the campaign. I encourage everyone to get shwopping. I will certainly be doing that. The Government is determined to do what it can to make a difference and I am pleased that, through this motion and today's debate, the Parliament will encourage the people of Scotland to support Oxfam's lift lives for good campaign in its aim to make an impact on poverty around the world.

Meeting closed at 17:38.

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